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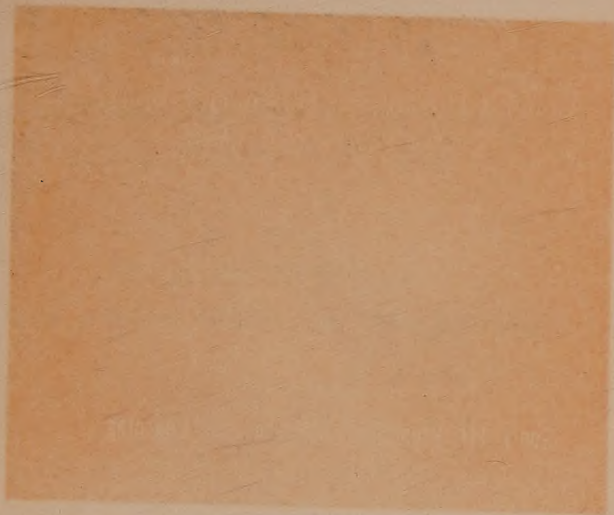
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THE GOSPEL OF THE INFANCY

*An Examination of the Opening Chapters
of S. Matthew and S. Luke*

Alison
Co. BY
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THE

BOOK

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TO
BRENDA MARGARET
A LITTLE CHILD . . .

PREFACE

THIS book is intended for the general reader who, bewildered by the claims of Modernism, is anxious to know on what grounds the Gospel record of our Lord's Infancy is assailed, and how far the arguments advanced against its genuineness can be met. The writer has, therefore, attempted to set out clearly the grounds of assault and to estimate their validity. References to, and quotations from, the works of distinguished theologians are freely given in order to fortify the main argument. A full discussion of the textual difficulties involved in S. Matthew i. 16 and S. Luke i. 34, 35 is not attempted. To the class of reader for whom this book is primarily intended such a discussion would be unintelligible.

The writer wishes to express his indebtedness to the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, who kindly read the greater part of the book in MS.

W. J. BROWN.

Epiphany, 1923.

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THE GOSPEL OF THE INFANCY

CHAPTER I

A Survey of the Critical Position

(i) MYTH OR HISTORY?

WE are living in an age when it must be confessed the sacred Scriptures are little read by large numbers of our fellow countrymen, and when even those "who profess and call themselves Christians" are not infrequently woefully ignorant of their Bibles. There is, however, one story at least—the story of the Birth of Christ—with which every one living in a Christian land is to some degree familiar. The shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night, the message of the angel, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the discovery of the Infant Christ in the manger of Bethlehem—these are graphic scenes in the Christmas drama which never entirely fade from the memory, even though Bible-reading and Church-going are left behind with childhood. No doubt the version an uninstructed or partially instructed Christian would give of the Birth of Christ would be

found to rest more upon the impressions gained from pictures or carols, than to be drawn directly from the Gospel narratives themselves; but however this may be, the Christmas story makes such a vivid appeal to the imagination of mankind that there must surely be few who are not at least acquainted with the fact that Christ was born of a Virgin Mother at Bethlehem.

The purpose of this little book is to inquire into the credibility of this well-known story. For indeed it would be somewhat disconcerting if the best known story of the Gospels was proved to be after all only a pious fiction. We have to ask, therefore, whether the Gospel of the Infancy as it is preserved for us in S. Matthew and S. Luke represents historic fact, or is simply a myth. This inquiry will therefore be concerned chiefly with evidence. At the outset, however, it must be plainly stated that while it might be possible for one who had never known Jesus except as a remote historical figure to approach the Gospel narratives with an absolutely open mind, for those who know Him as the Everliving Christ such an attitude is barely possible. Nevertheless, theological presuppositions or doctrinal considerations, while they cannot be entirely ruled out, must not be allowed to prejudge the question.

It may be thought, however, that since the Virgin-Birth of our Lord is explicitly stated in two Gospels, and is enshrined in the Creeds, it is an article of belief universally accepted by Christian people; and therefore to investigate the evidence for this belief

might appear to be a work of supererogation. It is, of course, perfectly true that the narratives containing the Gospel of the Infancy have been received by the Church as an integral part of the Gospel record, and their authenticity and genuineness on external grounds are unimpeachable; but it is also unquestionably true that some professing Christians find the evidence unconvincing or inadequate. Just as the stories of Creation and the Fall were once regarded as historical facts, but are now in the light of higher criticism shown to be mythological, containing profound religious truths, but not external facts of history, so the opening chapters of S. Matthew and S. Luke, it is argued, are true, but not in the sense that the events there recorded once actually happened in time, but rather they are attempts to express in terms of human speech the sublime truth of the Incarnation of the Son of God which transcends all categories of man's understanding.¹ When therefore we ask, Are these narratives true? we are asking a question by no means unambiguous. The plain man means by such a question, Was Christ really born of a Virgin at Bethlehem? but the question may also mean, What is the divine truth underlying these narratives?

This slight digression is intended to point out that

¹ "I can only regard this idea of miraculous birth as aetiological and honorific—in those days as natural and reasonable a way of accounting for a great personality and the experience of which Jesus was the cause and the centre, as it would be unnatural and irrational to-day."—J. F. Bethune-Baker, *Modern Churchman*, Sept. 1921, pp. 288-9.

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the evidence for the Virgin-Birth of our Lord at Bethlehem is not regarded by all as adequate, while others interpret the Gospel of the Infancy, not as history, but as an attempt to convey in a symbolic manner the truth of the Incarnation.

Two quotations from well-known English writers will illustrate both these points. Canon Glazebrook, of Ely, in a chapter on "Miracles" in his book *The Faith of a Modern Churchman*, writes¹:—

"Two cardinal miracles stand by themselves. These are the miraculous birth of our Lord and the resurrection of His Flesh. . . . As to the Virgin-Birth, it is urged that the evidence is not such as to compel belief. For the narratives in S. Matthew and S. Luke are barely reconcilable, while both include genealogies which have no meaning unless Joseph was the actual father of Jesus. S. Paul was evidently not acquainted with the story when he wrote the opening verses of Romans, where the mention of it would have greatly strengthened his argument. The author of S. John's Gospel was well acquainted with all the Synoptic Gospels, and he omits all reference to this event. Can he have done so for any reason except that he did not believe it to be a fact?"

It is important to observe that Canon Glazebrook does not here explicitly deny the Virgin-Birth, but the evidence for it he says is not sufficient "to compel belief." In the same book² he suggests that the clause of the Apostles' Creed "Born of the

¹ p. 70.

² p. 78.

Virgin Mary" might be interpreted symbolically as expressing faith in the Incarnation.

The other quotation we shall give is the last recorded utterance of the late Dr. Sanday upon this subject. It is found in a small but highly valuable tract on *The New Testament Background*, written in collaboration with Mr. Emmet, now Fellow of University College, Oxford¹:—

"The First Gospel and the Third each devote two chapters to the Nativity and Infancy of the Lord. Both stories must be regarded as poetry and not prose. Both are attempts to come a little nearer to the expressing of the inexpressible—the entrance of Deity into manhood."

Dr. Sanday makes no direct reference to the Virgin-Birth, but his language seems to imply that it is not to be taken as a literal account of how "Deity entered into manhood," but as an attempt to express "the inexpressible."

It is clear from the foregoing that both these writers cast doubts upon the historicity of the birth narratives. They are unquestionably true, but in the sense that they express, or attempt to express, the truth of the Incarnation, figuratively or in poetical language.

Similar expressions are not infrequently found in other English writers, while advanced critics in France and Germany are much more outspoken. Renan, it will be remembered, in his celebrated *Life of Jesus* only refers to Bethlehem in connection

¹ p. 21.

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with the "Legend of Jesus." The scene of the Gospel story opens in Nazareth, where we are told Jesus was born, Joseph being His natural father. Among certain German critics it has become a commonplace assumption that Christ was born at Nazareth, hence the Gospel of the Infancy is either omitted altogether,¹ or if retained, then, as we shall see later, it is attributed to pagan ² influences or to "religious instinct."³

Perhaps now the reader may realize more adequately the need and urgency of our inquiry. What view are we to take of the Christmas story? Are the Virgin-Birth and the events connected with it historically true, or are they myths or the creation of pious imagination? To answer these questions we shall have to examine the grounds upon which the historical trustworthiness of the Gospel is attacked. Before proceeding to consider them in detail it will be best to set out briefly but clearly the arguments against the genuineness of the Gospel of the Infancy.

(ii) THE GROUNDS OF ASSAULT

The first arises out of the researches made by students of *comparative religion*. This is a new science, rapidly gaining in popularity; and perhaps because some of the chief workers in this extremely

¹ So Wellhausen in his notes on the Gospels of S. Matthew and S. Luke (1904).

² Pfeiderer, *Christian Origins*.

³ Lobstein, *The Virgin-Birth*.

important field of investigation have been unorthodox Christians, if indeed Christians at all, the conclusions arrived at have sometimes been turned with apparently disastrous effect against the Christian religion.¹ Comparative religion collects religious phenomena and endeavours to dissociate truth from error. It is a new science in the sense that it embraces in its purview all religions and attempts to do justice to all.

One of the earliest attempts to discover truth in religions other than Christianity was made by Alexander Ross, who in 1653 wrote *The Religions of the World*. This work, although very bitter towards Islam and Judaism, represents "the intolerant attitude in its decline."² No great advance, however, was made until the end of the eighteenth century, when J. G. von Herder published his epoch-making work *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*. According to Herder there is a golden chain of culture encircling the world and reaching out "through all individuals to the throne of Providence." Religious rites and ceremonies, wherever found and however expressed, correspond to certain fundamental ideas which have intrinsic worth and value. This line of thought led to the application of the historical method to religion and reacted vitally upon men's attitude to Christianity. In Germany Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion* (1821-31) did much to

¹ The writer has in mind chiefly Grant Allen, E. Clodd, and Sir J. G. Frazer.

² M. Jastrow, *The Study of Religion*, p. 23. An invaluable work to the student of comparative religion.

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stimulate the comparative study of religion, while in England the most distinguished student was Professor F. Max Müller, of Oxford, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Hibbert Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion. Since his day comparative religion has made great progress; and all thoughtful people are under an immense debt of gratitude to Sir J. G. Frazer for his monumental work *The Golden Bough*, although it is often difficult to accept his conclusions. Comparative religion has an intimate bearing upon the Gospel of the Infancy, since it is alleged that according to the ancient faiths nearly all the founders of religions, and indeed many other great ones besides, were miraculously born, and therefore it is to be inferred that the Virgin-Birth of Christ is to be understood as a myth, perhaps borrowed from a religion contemporaneous with the rise of Christianity. The Gospel of the Infancy is therefore explained as a glorification of Christ, based by the Evangelists upon pagan myths or legends. Since no one believes these myths to be historical facts when they concern the founders of other religions, what grounds have we for believing that the Gospel of the Infancy, to which striking parallels are to be found in pagan legends, is other than a myth also? ¹ We shall deal in some detail

¹ This line of argument is well expressed by A. E. Taylor in a review of Dr. Harris's book *Creeds or No Creeds*. "I feel sure that Dr. Harris has forgotten, with reference to the particular miracle which he makes most of, that of our Lord's Nativity, that the real difficulty felt by so many is one which he never even mentions. It is not that the alleged event is unique, but precisely that it is *not*

with this argument later in this chapter. Here let us observe two quotations from modern writers having a direct bearing on this subject.

"Of all old-world legends, the death and resurrection of a virgin-born, or in some way divinely-born, Saviour was the most widespread."¹

"Such tales of virgin-mothers are relics of an age of childish ignorance, when men had not yet recognized the intercourse of the sexes as the true cause of offspring. That ignorance, still shared by the lowest of existing savages, the aboriginal tribes of Australia, was doubtless at one time universal among mankind."²

Closely allied with the argument that the Gospel of the Infancy in its most prominent features is to be attributed to mythology, is the idea that it is due to the Hebrew tendency of investing their heroes with marvellous births. The Christian Church grew out of the Jewish, and this process of glorification received its completest expression in the wonders preceding and accompanying the Birth of the Messiah. Thus, for instance, Lobstein, who rejects the theory of pagan influence, writes³ :—

"If the faith of Israel invested the ancestors and unique. Virgin-births are the most familiar of things to the anthropologist, and that is precisely why the modern reader of the Gospels asks himself why he should, in this one case, accord a credence to the story which he denies, as a matter of course, to countless other stories of the same kind."—*Theology*, pp. 100-01, August, 1922.

¹ V. Phelips, *The Churches and Modern Thought*, p. 59.

² J. G. Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, Bk. II, p. 220.

³ *The Virgin-Birth*, p. 71.

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heroes of the nation with a privilege which at the outset set a divine seal upon them, is it surprising that the Christian consciousness, absolutely convinced of the divine nature of the work and inspiration of Christ, should have attempted to explain the birth and nature of the Messiah by a greater miracle than any which had presided over the origin of the most famous prophets? Being greater than those who *received* the Holy Spirit from their earliest infancy, He was *conceived* by the Holy Spirit."

This aspect of the argument will be briefly considered at the close of this chapter; but it will necessarily come up again when we examine the narrative in S. Matthew.

The second line of attack upon the Gospel of the Infancy arises out of a *criticism of the Gospel narratives*. This criticism will be fully considered later. Here, however, we may set down the chief points in the argument.

1. The genealogies in S. Matthew and S. Luke are hopelessly irreconcilable.

2. If verses 34, 35, chapter i, are removed from S. Luke's account the Virgin-Birth vanishes from this Gospel. Further, S. Luke ii does not give a consistent story. The Virgin-Birth is implied in the verses cited above, but elsewhere Joseph is spoken of as the father of Jesus.

3. The accounts of the Infancy in S. Matthew and S. Luke are not only irreconcilable, they are contradictory.

4. According to some critics these chapters do not

form an integral part of the Gospels, but are an addition embodying a later tradition.

The third ground of attack is usually called *the argument from silence*. A careful examination of the New Testament reveals a remarkable silence, outside the opening chapters of S. Matthew and S. Luke, in regard to the Virgin-Birth and the Infancy. It will be dealt with in the last chapter. The critics affirm :—

(1) S. Mark, the earliest Gospel, knows nothing of a Virgin-Birth. On the contrary, certain passages tell heavily against it.

(2) Omit two verses from S. Luke's Gospel and the essential feature of the Infancy—the Virgin-Birth—disappears.

(3) S. John's Gospel makes no reference to the Virgin-Birth.

(4) S. Paul, the companion of S. Luke, not only is silent, but it is alleged uses language about our Lord's Birth entirely inconsistent with any such belief.

(5) The Acts of the Apostles is equally silent.

The fourth and last argument is based upon a *great historical blunder* committed by S. Luke. Chapter ii, vv. 1 and 2, read :—

“Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria.”

S. Matthew says nothing about this enrolment, but only that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in

the days of Herod the king. S. Luke is accused of making two mistakes. (1) Augustus did not order "a general enrolment." (2) Quirinius was *not* governor of Syria during the lifetime of Herod. Herod died in 4 B.C. Quirinius was governor of Syria in the year A.D. 6. This historical "blunder" will be considered when S. Luke's account of the Birth of Christ is examined.

(iii) COMPARATIVE RELIGION AND THE GOSPEL
OF THE INFANCY

Having thus made a rapid survey of the critical position, and observed the chief points urged against the historical veracity of the birth-narratives, let us return to the first ground of assault and attempt to estimate its validity. Comparative religion has made a far-reaching investigation into the practices and beliefs not only of the great historical religions now extant, but it has also explored the sacred literatures of the peoples of antiquity. Obviously its conclusions in regard to the religion of "primitive man," where no certain records survive, are only tentative, and in fact are constantly being revised. But where legends have been at first preserved orally and afterwards embodied in literary form, the student of comparative religion is on surer ground. Now it is beyond dispute that religion in its early stages is closely intertwined with mythology. The function of mythology is to explain, and therefore when concerned with reli-

gious beliefs and practices we might say mythology is early man's theology.

A casual acquaintance with the mythologies of the ancient world—Greece, Rome, Hindu, Persia, etc.—makes it evident that belief in the supernatural birth of celebrated men was very widespread. Otto Pfleiderer, in his work on *Christian Origins*, after pointing out that the idea of the Virgin-Birth of Christ was "congenial to the Heathen-Christians because of its exact analogy to the numerous sons of the gods in the mythical stories of heroes as well as the contemporaneous legends," sums up the position in the following words¹:—

"For not alone of the heroes of antiquity, but of the celebrated men who lived in the full light of history and made a powerful impression upon their contemporaries and successors in any walk of life, it was thought necessary to presuppose supernatural origin and divine begetting; for example, the funeral oration of Plato's nephew Speusippus mentions the legend current during the great philosopher's life that Periktione, his mother, bore him not as the child of her husband, but of the god Apollo; thus Alexander of Macedon and Scipio Africanus are sons of Zeus, and Augustus a son of Apollo; the new-Pythagorean saint and wonder-worker Apollonius of Tyana was looked upon by his countrymen as a son of Zeus."

Pfleiderer is thus led to the conclusion that the Gospel of the Infancy is to be attributed to the

¹ pp. 224-5.

influence of these pagan beliefs, and is not, therefore, to be regarded as historical fact, but rather, as he says, "a bit of transparent symbolism." "The poverty of the stall and the manger and the glow of light from heaven upon it, the greeting of the newborn Saviour by angelic hosts of heaven and by poor shepherds—these symbolize the contrast between the heavenly sublimity and earthly lowliness and point out beforehand that the message of salvation is destined especially for the poor and lowly of earth."¹

It is therefore argued that the Gospel of the Infancy is founded upon pagan legends. Usener states, "For the whole birth and childhood story of Matthew in its every detail it is possible to trace a pagan substratum."² According to Gressmann the origin of the Gospel narrative is traceable to an adaptation of a "foundling story," in which the "mystery child" is discovered by shepherds; and thus our Lord's Birth is linked on to the story of Romulus.

No doubt the association of ideas the above parallels illustrate is impressive and perhaps convincing for those who are not at pains to scrutinize the argument more closely. It is true that Christianity was launched into a world full of myths and "mystery religions," and it would be remarkable if it were not affected by them. Those, however, who affirm that the Gospel of the Infancy was borrowed from pagan sources, or that its chief

¹ p. 228.

² Art. "Nativity," *Ency. Biblica*, col. 3352.

features were moulded out of contemporary legends, have to prove (1) that a virgin-birth—the essential idea underlying the Gospel narratives—was embodied in the myths flourishing at the time Christianity arose, and (2) that the Christian story has been borrowed. It is important to observe clearly what the Gospels have to say about our Lord's Birth. It is nowhere suggested that the Birth was miraculous; but, on the contrary, from S. Luke's account it appears to have conformed with the laws of nature. The Apocryphal Gospels, it is true, affirm the Birth to have been miraculous; but in S. Matthew and S. Luke it is the *conception* that is supernatural. It was the Holy Spirit Who overshadowed the Blessed Virgin. We must not therefore confuse alleged supernatural births with the Virgin-Birth. What clear evidence is there that at the time the Gospels were written any pagan ideas of a virgin-birth existed?

If this evidence is forthcoming it has still to be proved that the Gospel of the Infancy was borrowed. It is significant that whereas miraculous births abound in ancient mythology, alleged virgin-births are extremely rare. The classical case is that of Buddha, and to this Pfleiderer refers:¹ "It is the more certain that historical traditions were not employed in the shaping of these prelude-stories (of S. Luke) because the most striking parallels are to be found in other myth-cycles, especially among the Buddha legends. The Indian Saviour,

¹ *Christian Origins*, pp. 228–30.

Gautama Sakyamuni, was miraculously born of the virgin queen Maya, into whose body the spirit-being Buddha ('the great man,' as he is called on account of his heavenly origin) enters unstained and unstaining. At his birth, also, a supermundane light irradiates the place, celestial hosts of spirits appear and intone a song of praise of the child who brings salvation to the world, joy and peace to all creation, and will reconcile the enmity between deity and humanity. Here, too, a pious seer appears who, by miraculous signs, recognizes the child as the future saviour from all evil and the teacher of perfect wisdom. Examples of early wisdom are also told of the growing Gautama; among other stories, it is told that, during a festival of his people, the boy was lost and, after an eager search, he was found by his father in a circle of holy men lost in pious reflection, whereupon he admonished the marvelling father to seek after higher things.

"These parallels to the childhood stories of Luke are too striking to be classed as mere chance; some kind of historical connection must be postulated, and since the Buddhistic legend is older than the Gospel of Luke (*Lalita Vistara* was translated into Chinese as early as A.D. 65), the dependence is on the side of the Christian Evangelist; how to regard this dependence, whether direct or indirect, and by what intermediate agencies, these are questions which cannot as yet be answered."

These remarkable parallels are so striking at first sight that too frequently the marked differences are

entirely overlooked. It is also very simple to exaggerate the parallels. Admitting, however, as we must that there is a resemblance to the Gospel story in the Buddhist legends, three lines of explanation are open :—(1) Christianity borrowed the story of the Infancy from the Buddhist legend. This, it has been suggested, may account specially for S. Luke's version, since his traditional home was Antioch, one of the chief cities where comparative mythology was studied. (2) The Christian story was incorporated, after much adaptation, into the Buddhist legends. (3) The two stories are entirely independent.

In order to be in a position to choose between these explanations, we must know with some degree of certainty what evidence there is in Buddhist literature or legend for the alleged virgin-birth of Buddha, and at what date this legend arose. If it can be conclusively proved that there is no evidence, or that the legend containing it postdated the Christian narratives, then borrowing on the Christian side is out of the question. If the legends are proved to be contemporary, then they must also be shown to be similar in their essential features for any borrowing to be suggested ; and if the borrowing is, let us say, on the Christian side, then we shall expect to find the Buddhist influence clearly observable in the conception ideas and perhaps even in the phraseology of the Christian account. On the other hand, if the similarities are only such as we might expect to find in the infancies of "great ones," then it is more

reasonable to suppose the accounts are independent. What is regarded as the most remarkable parallel is the virgin-birth of Buddha and of Christ. It is therefore with this that we shall deal.

As far as we know, Buddha was born *c.* 560 B.C. and died *c.* 480 B.C. The earliest Buddhist literature is that of the Pali canon dated approximately 350 B.C., i.e. some two hundred years after the birth of Buddha. Whatever is found in this literature cannot therefore be said to rest upon the same certainty as the Gospel narratives written within seventy years or so of the Birth of Christ. In the Pali canon there are three accounts of the birth of Buddha—the *Digha* and *Majjhima Nikayas* and the *Sutta Nipata*.¹ In the first of these, translated as the *Sublime Story*, Buddha relates to his disciples the story of six Buddhas who had lived before him. The important thing to notice is that, according to the *Sublime Story*, the mother of a Buddha—i.e. one who takes a vow to act as a saviour of mankind, such as was Buddha himself—was a woman without any sensual craving, and the child born was spotless, undefiled, and fully developed. The *Sublime Story* does not actually describe Buddha's birth, but by inference his birth would be of this kind. There is no suggestion that his mother was a virgin, but that she was without any sensual craving.

In the *Majjhima* the account is similar but a little

¹ See an article in *Church Quarterly Review*, "The Sutta and the Gospel," Oct., 1921; and the article "Virgin-Birth," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

more developed. Here again the emphasis is laid upon the purity of the mother, but there is no direct expression of virginity.

In the *Sutta Nipata* Buddha is said to have descended from the heaven of Tushita; but no reference is made to the virginity of his mother.

It must therefore be concluded that in the Pali canon, while the birth is regarded as miraculous, there is no expression which could be interpreted as implying virginity. The *Jātakas* or Buddhist birth stories, the majority of which are of later date than the Pali canon, and some late in the Christian era, show a considerable development in the miraculous birth. Maya Buddha's mother, having taken a vow of chastity, dreams of the Buddha in the form of a superb white elephant. "Three times he walked round his mother's couch, with his right side towards it, and striking her on her side he seemed to enter her womb." This is a common form of the story; observe it is only a dream, but it indicates a miraculous birth without any reference to the virginity of Maya.

Up to the Christian era, then, it might be argued with much force that there was no legend containing the virgin-birth of Buddha. The miraculous birth, however, was well established and, as we have observed, had developed during the centuries. This constitutes a strong argument in favour of the probability that the virgin-birth, at first no essential feature in the Buddhist legend, might have been borrowed from another source. The Buddhist

legend, unlike the Christian, was not a stereotyped but a developing one. This might suggest the probability that the virgin-birth of Buddha, for which there is no evidence until the Christian era, was borrowed from the Christian tradition. The *Lalita Vistara* to which Pfeleiderer refers is generally regarded as post-Christian, and is dated by some as late as the third century after Christ.¹ However, let the early date stand. What resemblances has this story to the Virgin-Birth of our Lord? The *Lalita Vistara* gives an account of Buddha's pre-natal state in the Abode of Joy, and of the heavenly being who appears to announce his birth. The Buddha from his heavenly home gives a description of his mother Maya, who has had no carnal desires for thirty-two months. The birth is without human paternity, and the Buddha enters his mother in the form of an elephant;² he emerges from his mother's right side, without any pain to her, in possession of full knowledge. The miracles accompanying the birth are innumerable. On the seventh day his mother's heart breaks. It is to be observed that there is no indication that Maya was *virgo intacta* at the time of Buddha's birth, but that she had not entertained carnal thoughts for thirty-two months. The *Buddha Charita*, a Sanskrit poem (c. A.D. 100), describes the birth of Buddha in a similar way.

¹ "The later expanded biographies, composed in post-Christian times, such as the *Lalita Vistara*, c. A.D. 250. . . ."—Appended Note (10), Box, *Virgin-Birth*, p. 231.

² The elephant is supposed to symbolize endurance and self-control.

Now it is extremely difficult to believe that the Buddhist legend, which originally contained no virgin-birth, and in its later forms does not in the strict Christian sense, could have influenced the Christian tradition in such a way as to have become incorporated in the Gospel narrative. There is no clear proof that the alleged virgin-birth of Buddha preceded the Christian tradition, nor yet is there any convincing evidence of a virgin-birth.¹ Moreover, we have observed that the Buddhist legend undergoes considerable amplification during a long period of development. Most probably, therefore, it expanded along its own lines, and is completely independent of the Christian tradition. This would be the most reasonable conclusion to arrive at. While at first sight there are striking similarities, on closer examination the two traditions reveal equally striking differences. The Buddhist legend is obviously artificial and far-fetched; while the Gospel narratives are remarkably free from grotesque miracles, and their simplicity and naturalness seem to stamp them as authentic. As a historical fact it has been shown that Buddhism did not influence Christian thought until the end of the first century, when the Virgin-Birth of our Lord had been for thirty years at least incorporated in the Gospels.²

¹ See article "Bodhisattva," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

² "Buddhism and Christianity first met in fruitful contact (c. A.D. 100)—a date two or three decades later than the Synoptics."—Kennedy, *Journal Royal Asiatic Society*, 1917, *Gospels of the Infancy*, p. 219.

The argument, therefore, that the Gospel of the Infancy is to be attributed to Buddhist legends does not fit in with the evidence we possess.

It has already been pointed out that whereas in ancient mythology supernatural births are plentiful, any approach to a virgin-birth is extremely rare. Thus Celsus, who attacked Christianity in the early ages, referred to the births of Perseus, Amphion, Aecus, and Minos as miraculous, but none of these myths contained a *virgin* birth.

For the sake of argument, supposing we admit that in the ancient religions there are supernatural births and even virgin-births, what inference are we to draw? Why should these supernatural births have bulked so prominently in the minds of the ancient world? They might be attributed to crudity of thought, a half-understanding of nature and of God, which a profounder insight pronounces "superstitious." But after all is this an adequate explanation? Is it not more reasonable to suppose that behind these myths there lay a truth which should some day receive full expression? Those who see in the whole history of religion, from its earliest beginnings to the highest forms of revelation and religious life, a continuity and a progress—often, it is true, checked but nevertheless real—do not regard the myths of the pre-Christian age and of the age contemporary with the Birth of Christ, as superstitions only, but rather as indicating "guesses" and gropings after truth, but after real truth which should some day receive verification. The science of com-

parative religion, at present admittedly in its infancy, does illumine the Apostolic phrase that God "left not Himself without witness"; and may we not see behind all these pagan myths a glimmer of a great truth, that the Saviour of men should be in a unique sense the offspring of God, being conceived by His Holy Spirit ?¹

So far we have seen that the Gospel of the Infancy cannot be proved to have been derived from pagan sources, because there is no certainty that legends in any real sense parallel to it existed. But we have not yet finished with the argument. If the Gospel stories are dependent upon pagan influences, then we might quite reasonably expect to find that influence indicated in the language and setting of the Gospel narratives. For instance, as already pointed out in the Buddhist legend, the Buddha enters his mother Maya in the form of an elephant, and other marvellous and grotesque miracles are recorded. But the story of the Gospels—unlike that in the Apoc-

¹ This view is well expressed in Dr. Nolloth's *The Person of our Lord*, pp. 286-95, and also by Dr. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, p. 533, as follows: "I have already expressed my complete incredulity as to the existence of precise heathen parallels to the Gospel story. But even if we grant the point, what then? Then we should have once more to recognize that the ethnic world had been dreaming of great things yet to be. As with ideas like those of Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, and many more, some dim prevision of and craving for transcendent Divine realities had already visited the souls of men. . . . These hopes the Gospel was to realize. But it realized them, we may believe, not by borrowing ideas or decking itself out in ancient symbols, but by the exhibition of a fact within the field of history in which were more than fulfilled the inextinguishable yearnings of the world's desire."

ryphal Gospels—is entirely free from such wild phantasy. There is a simplicity and beauty and naturalness which argue strongly in favour of its genuineness. There is not a single phrase or idea that can be attributed to a pagan source. On the contrary, both records of the Infancy are steeped in Jewish thought and phraseology. In S. Matthew's account the constant appeal to prophecy shows that the Evangelist had his mind set on the Old Testament, not on a pagan myth; while S. Luke's account, both in the narrative portion and in the psalms, is most probably, as Dr. Box argues, based upon a Hebrew original.¹ Neither S. Matthew's nor S. Luke's record bears any trace either in conception, setting, or language of any pagan influence. Of course it might be argued that the ideas are foreign although they are clothed in Jewish language; but it is just the pagan element which cannot be found to exist.

The marked Hebraistic setting of the Gospel of the Infancy has led some to argue that the narratives—especially the Virgin-Birth—are due to Old Testament influence. Thus Lobstein, who rejects the idea of pagan influence, considers that the Virgin-Birth is the logical and inevitable development of the Old Testament “miraculous births.” The “religious instinct” which surrounded the cradles of Isaac, Samson, and Samuel with poetic traditions and wonderful births, invented the wonderful birth of John the Baptist, and culminated in the supernatural

¹ Dr. Box, *The Virgin-Birth of Jesus*, p. 42 ff.

conception of our Lord. "Being greater than those who *received* the Holy Spirit from their earliest infancy, He was *conceived* of the Holy Spirit."

The influence of the Old Testament—especially Isaiah vii. 14—will be considered later, but here it must be pointed out that so far as we know there was no anticipation on the part of the Jews that the Messiah should be virgin-born.¹ It is therefore inconceivable that the Virgin-Birth could have been invented under pressure of Jewish influence.

In this chapter a brief survey has been made of the critical position, and the argument from comparative religion has been dealt with in some detail. Whether the Gospel of the Infancy is myth or history we are not yet in a position to state. We have seen, however, that it cannot be attributed to pagan influences, and although it is clearly affected by Hebrew thought and phraseology, yet its central fact—the Virgin-Birth—cannot have been derived from Hebrew sources. We now approach the narratives of S. Matthew and S. Luke at least assured that they are the genuine product of the Christian spirit. Is it possible to discover with any degree of certainty who or what are the ultimate sources underlying the narratives?

¹ "There was no expectation so far as we can judge of a Virgin-Birth, and it was, so far as we can judge, inconsistent with ordinary Jewish expectations and prejudices."—Dr. Headlam, *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 292.

CHAPTER II

The Probable Sources

(i) THE SOURCES OF THE GOSPELS

THE line of argument that would trace the Gospel narratives of the Infancy to the influence of pagan mythology having been shown untenable, we have now to discover what were the probable sources. In any historical inquiry it is of first-rate importance that the student should go back, if possible, to the original sources. Now in the case of the Gospels the precise form of the sources, their manner and date of composition, are to some degree matters of conjecture. Our Lord Himself committed nothing to writing so far as we know. He certainly left behind Him no written document. His life and teaching were preserved in the hearts of His disciples. If we assume that our Lord died in about the year A.D. 30, then for some thirty years at least the Christian story must have been kept alive by oral instruction and preaching. Two chief reasons may be assigned for the writing of the Gospels. In the first place some of the first-hand witnesses were dead, and therefore it was imperative that the oral record should take a more permanent form. Then secondly, with the remarkable growth of the Christian Church, oral instruction was no longer adequate; a written

Gospel was required. This is given as one of the reasons by S. Luke in the prologue to his Gospel.¹

The question of the sources of what we have termed the Gospel of the Infancy involves some consideration of the sources of the Synoptic Gospels. Is the Gospel of the Infancy derived from the same sources as the Synoptic Gospels, or has it drawn upon special sources? In order to answer this question we must review briefly the main sources of the Synoptic Gospels. Upon whom did the Evangelists rely for their information? Let us look first at S. Mark. Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, writing about A.D. 120, gives an account of the origin of S. Mark's Gospel which is very generally accepted:—

“Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said or done. For he was not a hearer of the Lord, nor a follower of His; he followed Peter, as I have said, at a later date, and Peter adapted his instructions to practical needs, without any attempt to give the Lord's words systematically. So that Mark was not wrong in writing down some things in this way from memory, for his one concern was neither to omit nor to falsify anything he had heard.”

According to this tradition S. Mark was not himself an eye-witness, but wrote down what he remembered of S. Peter's preaching. The Gospel is

¹ “To *write* unto thee . . . that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed” (S. *Luke* i. 3, 4).

therefore based upon Apostolic witness. Papias has also an important passage in regard to the Gospel bearing S. Matthew's name. He says: "Matthew composed the oracles (the *logia*) in the Hebrew dialect, and each one interpreted them as he was able."

There is a great difference of opinion as to what these oracles were. Some think they were a collection of Christ's saying, but others regard them as Messianic proof-texts, which abound in the Gospel bearing S. Matthew's name. The late Dr. Selwyn advanced the theory that collections of oracles derived from the Old Testament are the ultimate source of the New Testament, and that the Gospels arose out of the comments of readers or preachers upon them.¹ We shall have occasion to refer to these oracles again; but here it is sufficient to observe that they constitute one of the sources of the Gospels.

So far we have seen there are two sources of the Gospels—S. Mark and the oracles. S. Mark, however, is not the source of one Gospel only, but of three. If we omit the opening chapters of S. Matthew and S. Luke we find these two Gospels follow S. Mark remarkably closely. On the whole they tell the story in much the same way, and generally speaking they follow the order of S. Mark. When S. Mark breaks off abruptly at xvi. 8, then S. Matthew and S. Luke diverge widely. With the exception of two miracles² and one parable³ the whole of S. Mark is included in S. Matthew or S. Luke or both.

¹ *First Christian Ideas*, etc.

² S. Mark vii. 31-37; viii. 22-26.

³ *ibid.*, iv. 26-29.

S. Mark is not only the earliest written Gospel (A.D. 60-65), but S. Matthew and S. Luke based their narratives upon it. Thus we may state with certainty that the earliest source now extant for the life and teaching of Jesus—omitting the last twelve verses, which are no real part of the Gospel—is the Gospel of S. Mark.

In addition to S. Mark there is matter not in S. Mark common to S. Matthew and S. Luke. This is usually called *Q*, from the German word for source, and is sometimes identified with the *logia* of S. Matthew mentioned above.

This brief sketch of the Gospel sources will make clear the position in regard to the Gospel of the Infancy. S. Mark, the primitive Gospel, containing the simplest and most graphic record of the Apostolic tradition about our Lord, makes no reference to the Infancy at all. This is natural enough if we suppose this Gospel contains the record to which the Apostles bore witness. Nevertheless, the "silence" of S. Mark removes the chief source of the Gospel narratives. If we assume the *logia* to be Messianic proof-texts, then they do in a sense form a source for the Gospel of the Infancy; but if the *logia* are identified with *Q*, then the second source of the Gospel narratives is silent. In any case the oracles, being Old Testament scriptures, must be regarded as an illustrative rather than a positive source, and therefore we are driven to look elsewhere for the probable sources of the Gospel of the Infancy.

(ii) THE GENUINENESS OF S. MATTHEW I AND II
AND S. LUKE I AND II

It has been often suggested that the opening chapters of S. Matthew and S. Luke are not genuine portions of the Gospels, but were added at a later date, when the doctrine of the Virgin-Birth had been incorporated in the Christian tradition. How are we to decide whether these chapters were written at the same time and by the same hand as the rest of the Gospels? Interpolations we know are not infrequent in the New Testament. But here we are dealing not with a word or phrase, or even a verse, but with four chapters; and in the case of S. Luke remarkably long chapters. If interpolations of this character could have been made into the Gospels without detection, then we may indeed suspect the trustworthiness of the Gospels as a whole. But the only reason for suggesting that these chapters are interpolations, written by another hand or by the same hand at a later date, is not because their linguistic style varies from the rest of the Gospels, but solely because the Virgin-Birth is therein contained. The critics, therefore, who object to the supernatural conception of our Lord are driven to the desperate expedient of suggesting, or definitely stating, without the slightest evidence in their support, that these chapters are later, and perhaps by another hand. In the beginning of this little book we suggested that in order to treat the evidence fairly it was

important to reduce theological presupposition to a minimum. This is what the "advanced" critics rarely succeed in doing. Lobstein, for instance, a reverent and thoughtful writer who tries to preserve the religious content of the Virgin-Birth, while denying it to be a fact in time, without stopping to produce any evidence or argument in support, remarks:—

"Further, it has often been pointed out even in the gospels of Matthew and Luke these two chapters do not form part of the main body of the narrative, and the solution of continuity is so marked that it may well be asked whether they were not a later addition."¹

Those who are at pains to examine these chapters carefully are not of the opinion that they are a later addition; or do not form an integral part of the Gospel narratives. Hawkins in his remarkably careful analysis of S. Matthew i and ii shows conclusively that the words peculiar to S. Matthew are specially conspicuous in these chapters, and their continuity with the rest of the Gospel is clearly demonstrated.² In regard to S. Luke i and ii, while it is readily admitted there is a "solution of continuity," the explanation of which will be forthcoming a little later, Harnack³ and Hawkins⁴ have both shown that these chapters are characteristically Lukan in style and language.

¹ *The Virgin-Birth of Christ*, p. 42.

² *Horae Synopticae*, 2nd ed., p. 9.

³ *Luke the Physician*, pp. 96-105.

⁴ *Horae Synopticae*, 2nd ed., p. 24.

There seems no doubt that the Gospel of the Infancy forms an integral part of the Gospel narratives; and judging from its literary style there is no reason to cast doubts upon its authenticity. Neither can it be proved that the opening chapters of S. Matthew and S. Luke are a later addition. Further, not only is the internal evidence clearly in favour of the authenticity of these chapters, but the MS. authority has never been questioned.

Until, therefore, more convincing arguments are advanced, we feel perfectly justified in regarding the Gospel of the Infancy as an authentic and genuine part of the Gospel record.

(iii) A COMPARISON OF THE ACCOUNTS

The first thing that strikes the reader in comparing the two accounts of our Lord's Infancy is their independent character. To make this quite clear, the order of events in each Gospel is set down in parallel columns:—

S. MATTHEW.

- (1) Genealogy.
- (2) Message of angel to Joseph.
- (3) Birth at Bethlehem.
- (4) Visit of Magi.
- (5) Flight into Egypt.
- (6) Slaughter of the Innocents.
- (7) Death of Herod.
- (8) Home at Nazareth.

S. LUKE.

- (1) Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary.
- (2) Visit of Mary to Elisabeth.
- (3) The Enrolment.
- (4) Birth at Bethlehem.
- (5) Visit of the Shepherds.
- (6) Circumcision (eight days).
- (7) Purification (forty days).
- (8) Home at Nazareth.
- (9) Visit to the Temple (twelve years).
- (10) Genealogy, chapter iii. 23
Also the canticles.

Omitting the genealogies, we find that twelve episodes are included in the Gospel of the Infancy. Of these S. Matthew gives seven, S. Luke nine; but the remarkable fact is that only two events are recorded by both Evangelists: that Christ was born of a Virgin at Bethlehem, and at some period difficult to state precisely the Holy Family settled at Nazareth.

Now the inference to be drawn from these obvious differences is not that the Gospels contradict one another, for this cannot be affirmed with any certainty, but rather that behind these two narratives there is no common source. They are as strikingly independent as two narratives describing the same childhood well could be. In our present state of knowledge it may be impossible to fit in the events to produce a harmonious record, but this is not to say that they are contradictory. What the evidence does most clearly prove is the independence of the two narratives.¹

We have already observed that the Gospel of the Infancy is not found in the main sources of the Synoptic Gospels. We cannot tell with absolute certainty what the sources were; but an examination of the narratives may at least indicate the probable sources.

¹ "If we take the two narratives together, we find them utterly independent, and the author of each one appears to be ignorant of the narrative of the other. They are not strictly discrepant, but independent."—Dr. Gore, *Belief in God*, p. 279.

(iv) THE PROBABLE SOURCE OF S. MATTHEW'S
ACCOUNT

Let us take S. Matthew first. Who is the chief actor? Who is the character that figures most prominently? Clearly it is Joseph. In thirty verses he is mentioned six times by name. To him the angel appears in a dream when he thought of putting Mary away privily; again, when he is warned to flee with Mary and the Child into Egypt; and again when Herod is dead. Mary is a figure of no great prominence. She is mentioned, but simply out of necessity. The central figure is Joseph. Further, it is clear that, if the narrative is in any sense authentic, the information concerning the dreams could only have been communicated by Joseph himself. It is therefore at least a reasonable hypothesis that behind the Matthaean account there lies a source which came ultimately from Joseph.¹ That in its transmission it was adapted or remodelled is extremely probable. Whether it was written or oral we cannot say. The Gospels, apart from the opening chapters of S. Matthew and S. Luke, tell us nothing about Joseph beyond the mere fact that he was a carpenter. From the Gospel silence it is

¹ "The narrative itself in S. Matthew is characterized—in contrast with that in S. Luke—by the attention bestowed on the part played by Joseph. It may well be that traditions on this subject were preserved among his descendants and kin, who (it would seem), or some of whom, up to the close of the first century held a more or less marked place in the Christian community in Palestine."—Dr. Stanton, *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, Part ii, p. 346.

inferred that he died before our Lord had begun His public ministry. In support of the hypothesis that the source is Joseph, we may point out that the events recorded are just those we should expect from a man. The more definitely religious side is in the background, or omitted; the stirring events which would be indelibly impressed upon a man's mind are there: the romantic visit of the Magi; the flight into Egypt, the slaughter of the Innocents, and the journey back. In S. Matthew's account, on the face of it, we have a man's story. The events are those that would be most readily remembered by a man. We suggest that man was Joseph. This is an hypothesis which at least does not do violence to the facts. But how the record was preserved we cannot say, and we do not know how it was transmitted to the Evangelist. The Messianic proof-texts interwoven in the narrative will be considered when we examine the chapters in detail.

(v) THE PROBABLE SOURCE OF S. LUKE'S
ACCOUNT

When we pass to S. Luke we are on surer ground. The source seems undeniably clear, and even its transmission may be explained. We have already pointed out that according to the tradition of Papias, S. Mark was not an eye-witness. S. Matthew was, but it is not absolutely certain that he was the author of the Gospel bearing his name.¹ S. Luke tells us

¹ The arguments alleged against the Matthaean authorship are :—

(a) The Gospel "cannot be simply a translation of a work in

plainly in the prologue to his Gospel that he was not an eye-witness. In the English, however, the language is a little ambiguous, if not misleading: "Even as *they* delivered them unto us, *which* from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word"; "which" refers back to "they," not to "us."

There is, however, a much more important point to notice about this prologue. S. Luke says that many accounts of our Lord's life had been attempted. Of these "many" we possess none, unless S. Mark's is included. It would appear that S. Luke was not satisfied with the earlier attempts, and therefore he proposes to arrange afresh the tradition he had received from eye-witnesses. This he will do with care. He is going back to the *beginning*; that is apparently to the events immediately preceding Christ's Birth. He has traced the course of *all things*, implying thorough mastery; and this he has done *accurately*. He is going to write *in order* ("consequently.")¹ This need not imply strict chronological

Hebrew or Aramaic." The ancient tradition is that S. Matthew wrote for Hebrew Christians in their own language. This would seem to rule out the contention that S. Matthew wrote the Gospel in Greek.

(b) "It is inconceivable that an Apostle would have followed so closely the hearer of another Apostle, instead of giving his independent testimony as an eye-witness."—See Dr. Stanton, *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, Part ii, pp. 363-7.

¹ Dr. Selwyn makes this the distinguishing feature of S. Luke's Gospel as contrasted with the "many." "Many persons memorized a story by marshalling the materials in the shape of oracles like those of Matthew the publican. In the present case their writings were no more than disjointed notes. The several supposed lost gospels never existed."—*First Christian Ideas*, p. 75.

order, but it does indicate systematic arrangement of the material. The prologue is indeed impressive, and gives us a clear indication of the high standard S. Luke set himself. In itself it is a strong *a priori* argument in favour of the genuineness of the events he records.

It is to be further observed that the prologue is in classical Greek, but as soon as the narrative opens the style changes. Why? It has been urged by some that S. Luke was such a master of style that he could, if he chose, adapt his idiom and vocabulary to the events he is recording. The opening chapters of his Gospel are concerned with Jews living in an intensely Jewish atmosphere, and therefore he introduces into the narrative not only Hebraistic touches, but a set of psalms based upon Hebrew models. That S. Luke was a literary artist there is no question; but the phrases and ideas—the whole atmosphere—are so thoroughly Hebraistic that the hypothesis that S. Luke was translating from a Hebrew document or documents is highly probable.¹ The extremely interesting and important question is, Who communicated these documents or the information they contain to S. Luke?

A careful reading of the narrative makes it clear that it was a woman. Thus the dating of events is

¹ The chief objection to the view that these chapters are the free composition of S. Luke "is the difficulty of imagining how a Gentile Christian like Luke could throw himself back, by a supreme effort of the historical imagination, to the standpoint of these chapters."—Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, p. 267.

obviously in a woman's style: S. Luke i. 24, "And after these days Elisabeth his wife conceived; and she hid herself five months"; i. 26, "Now in the sixth month"; i. 56, "And Mary abode with her about three months." It is extremely improbable that a man would have marked out events in this way. Then too it is significant that women predominate in the narrative—Elisabeth, Mary, and Anna the prophetess. It has been truly said there "is a womanly spirit in the whole narrative which seems inconsistent with the transmission from man to man."¹ And just as in S. Matthew Joseph is the chief character, in S. Luke it is Mary. Joseph is here only mentioned three times by name, while Mary is named twelve times. Thus we are led to infer that behind these chapters there is a source which was derived ultimately from the Virgin Mary. If the narrative is authentic, and it bears all the marks of genuineness, then it is clear the greater part, because of its very nature, must have depended upon Mary. How could an expression as the following have been otherwise derived: "But Mary kept all these sayings (or things), pondering them in her heart"?

We have already seen that it is highly probable S. Luke is translating Hebrew documents in this account of the Infancy. It is not suggested that Mary wrote them, although this would not be impossible. The hypothesis is that she supplied the information in a form, no doubt refashioned by the

¹ Ramsay, *Was Christ born at Bethlehem?* p. 88.

Evangelist, which in its essential features is preserved in S. Luke's narrative. That form as it was transmitted by the Virgin Mary might well have been oral. It may have been first committed to writing in Hebrew by S. Luke himself, who subsequently translated it into Greek; or it may have come to S. Luke in a written form through some intermediary. It is not impossible that S. Luke derived it direct from Mary; we have no direct or indirect evidence, however, to support this contention. More probably it came to S. Luke in a written Hebrew form through an intermediary. Is there any possibility of discovering this intermediary?

Dr. Sanday some years back made an interesting suggestion which is at least worthy of serious consideration.¹ There are indications in S. Luke's Gospel, as well as in the Acts of the Apostles, that the Evangelist possessed a special source of information connected with the court of the Herods. To this source S. Luke was indebted for facts not given by the other Evangelists. Thus S. Luke is able to state that on the day of our Lord's trial Herod and Pilate "were made friends together, for before they were at enmity between themselves." Again, a singular piece of information is contained in Acts xii. 20. Herod Agrippa "was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: and they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was fed from the king's

¹ *Critical Questions*, pp. 137-41 (1906).

country." There are three characters mentioned by S. Luke not known to any other historian: Blastus, Menaen¹ (the foster-brother of Herod the Tetrarch), and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward.² Luke's information in regard to them would appear to be drawn from this special source.

It is to this Joanna that our attention is now directed. She is mentioned four times, twice by name.

"And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered unto them of their substance."³

"And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed with him from Galilee, stood afar off, seeing these things."⁴

Joanna is not mentioned by name here, but it is highly probable that she was present at the Crucifixion.

"Now they were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James."⁵ The morning of the Resurrection.

"These all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus."⁶

From these references there can be little doubt that Joanna must have been well known to Mary; indeed they were probably constantly in one another's company. Now it is suggested that since S. Luke had special information connected with the court of

¹ Acts xiii. 1.

⁴ *ibid.* xxiii. 49.

² S. Luke viii. 3.

⁵ *ibid.* xxiv. 10.

³ *ibid.*

⁶ Acts i. 14.

the Herods, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, was known to Mary, it was to Joanna the Blessed Virgin communicated her story. It is possible that Joanna wrote it down, and this information respecting our Lord's Infancy was thus derived, along with the other special information, from her by S. Luke. This is, of course, only conjecture.¹ It is, however, supported by the fact that S. Luke was apparently at Caesarea with S. Paul, where the Herods lived, for two years.²

We have so far shown that the Gospel of the Infancy cannot be attributed to pagan myths. It is a Jewish-Christian document. The narratives suggest that they have been communicated, how precisely cannot be stated, by those who alone could have been in full possession of the facts, Joseph and Mary. Now let us examine the accounts themselves.

¹ "I only hold fast to the central fact, which seems to be satisfactorily proved, that in some such way as this particulars known only to the Virgin Mother herself might easily and naturally, and without any forcing of the evidence, have come into the hands of S. Luke, and come into them through a woman."—Dr. Sanday, *Critical Questions*, p. 141.

² Acts xxiv. 27.

CHAPTER III

S. Matthew's Account of the Infancy

(i) THE GENEALOGY

WHETHER the first Gospel was written by Matthew the publican or not, it is quite clear that it is the work of a Hebrew Christian intended for Hebrew Christians. The chief aim of the Gospel is to show that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Jewish hopes and expectations, and that His followers, so far from being a despised sect who had cut themselves off from the Israel of God, preserved in themselves the true line of succession. Hence S. Matthew emphasizes the Davidic origin and Messianic claims of Christ. This is especially clear in the genealogy, which first calls for attention.

A genealogy at first sight is anything but an inspiring document; when, however, it is scrutinized more closely remarkably interesting facts are sometimes disclosed, and the genealogy may become fascinating. This is so with the genealogy in S. Matthew. A first glance shows that it is drawn up according to a plan; it is divided into three groups, each containing fourteen generations. The artificiality of this arrangement will become apparent in a moment. But why, it may be asked, fourteen generations? The purpose of the genealogy is to

answer a question the Jews were bound to ask: Is this Messiah of the House of David? The genealogy answers this definitely by describing Jesus as the son of David,¹ while the Davidic origin of Christ is further emphasized by the form the genealogy assumes. It is not improbable that there are three groups because there are three letters in David's name, and the total numerical value of the letters is fourteen ($\frac{717}{464}$). No doubt such an arrangement strikes us as being singularly artificial, but it was a favourite device of ancient Jewish genealogists, and in this case it renders the appeal of the genealogy more impressive. The descent of our Lord is traced back behind David to Abraham, the father of the Chosen Race. It is clear, therefore, that the genealogy is designed to show that Jesus was descended from Abraham through David the king; it is a *royal* genealogy, as the list of kings makes evident.

The genealogy in S. Luke has quite a different purpose, although it is perfectly consonant with the aim of that Gospel. It is usually assumed that S. Luke was a Gentile writing for Gentile Christians. He therefore traces our Lord's ascent to the son of Adam, the son of *God*²—the Universal Father of Jew and Gentile.

S. Matthew's genealogy has therefore an apologetic value. It is the aim of the Evangelist to commend

¹ "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."—*S. Matt.* i. 1.

² S. Luke iii. 38.

Christ to the Jews. This he does first by showing that Christ fulfils the Messianic requirement in respect of descent. When, however, we examine the names we find that the apologetic value of the genealogy is not confined to the great question of the Davidic descent, but it may also be urged on behalf of the Virgin-Birth. It is significant and interesting to observe that four women are mentioned, three by name: Tamar,¹ Rahab and Ruth,² and "her that had been the wife of Uriah," i.e. Bathsheba.³ The introduction of Ruth is for the purpose of tracing the descent to David; but Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were all women of bad character. Why should they be included in a genealogy of the Messiah? The answer seems to be as follows: there can be little doubt that in the minds of some people there was an unfathomable mystery about the relation of Jesus to Mary; and where mystery of this kind exists scandalmongers are always ready to make unsavoury suggestions. It would appear that slanders were in the air, and Mary's character was not regarded as beyond reproach. The Evangelist, in the narrative following the genealogy, effectively shows that the aspersions cast upon the moral integrity of Mary were devoid of foundation in fact, since the Birth of the Child was through the operation of the Holy Spirit; yet nevertheless, even if any suspicion was entertained, it would not in itself invalidate the Davidic origin and Messianic claim of Jesus, Mary's Son. On the contrary, if the

¹ S. Matt. i. 3.² *ibid.* 5.³ *ibid.* 6.

Jews were to be consistent in their reasoning they would have to admit that women of doubtful character—Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba—had played an important part in the history of David's line, but this did not vitiate the whole stock. Still less, therefore, could any suspicion about Mary, whose character the Evangelist goes on to show was irreproachable, be held an adequate argument for rejecting her Son. Unless S. Matthew had in his mind some apologetic intention of this kind it is extraordinarily difficult to understand why these women should have been included. The genealogy, therefore, not only shows that Jesus was legally descended from Abraham through David, but the introduction of these women prepares the way for the most definite and explicit account of the Virgin-Birth the New Testament contains.¹

The artificiality of the genealogy is apparent in the second group of generations, where the fourteen are arrived at by the omission of three steps: Joram begat Ahaziah,² Ahaziah begat Joash, Joash begat

¹ "The references to Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, can only be explained as due to the Editor of the Gospel, who saw in the life histories of these women a divine overruling of history from which a right understanding of Mary's virginity might be drawn."—Allen, *S. Matthew*, p. 5.

"Throughout the whole genealogy the Evangelist appears to be telling us in an audible aside that the heir had often been born out of the direct line or irregularly. Tamar the daughter-in-law of Judah, Rahab the harlot, Ruth the Moabitess, and the unnamed wife of Uriah, are forced upon our attention, as if to prepare us for still greater irregularity in the last stage."—Burkitt, *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe*, ii, p. 260.

² 2 Chron. xxii. 1.

Amaziah, Amaziah begat Azariah=Uzziah. Further, Jechoniah (in *v.* 11) stands for Jehoiakim, but in the third group (*v.* 12) Jechoniah refers to Jehoiachin, and thus again a step has been omitted.

Verse 16 has given rise to much discussion. As the text stands in the Gospel: "and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, Who is called Christ"—the Virgin-Birth is clearly implied. Joseph is not stated to be the father of Jesus.

It is, however, very difficult to reconcile the statement that Jacob begat Joseph with S. Luke iii. 23. Here Jesus is described as the son (as was supposed) of Joseph—S. Luke is correcting the popular opinion—who was the son of Heli. In our present state of knowledge it is not possible to reconcile these two statements. It has been suggested that Joseph's father was Jacob but that he was the heir of Heli. Others think that Jacob was the father of Mary. In the Apocryphal Gospels the father of the Virgin Mary is given as Joachim and her mother Anna. While apparent contradictions of this kind are a little disconcerting, what is of far more importance is the insistence in both genealogies upon the fact that Jesus was not the natural son of Joseph.

Then again, doubt is sometimes cast upon the correctness of the text of verse 16. The reading of the vast majority of MSS. and versions is that contained in the Gospel. There are, however,

a number of variant readings, and one important MS. (the Sinai Syriac) has the following: "Jacob begat Joseph. Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus, called the Messiah." This would seem to imply the paternity of Joseph. It is to be observed, however, that Mary is described as "the Virgin," and it is not at all certain that, assuming this reading is correct, that "begat" implies physical descent. All through the genealogy it refers to legal descent. Moreover, it is to be borne in mind that the MS. authority for the verse as it appears in the Gospel cannot be lightly set aside.¹

The genealogy in S. Matthew may therefore be said to be conclusive on two points: (1) Jesus was descended from Abraham through David, and therefore His Messianic claim was vindicated on this ground. (2) Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary.

(ii) THE ANNUNCIATION TO JOSEPH

The remainder of this chapter (*vv.* 18-25) gives an account of the annunciation to Joseph and the Birth of our Lord. Before commenting on some interesting points in the narrative, it is important to notice one fact that is perfectly plain. Three times the narrative affirms in the most explicit manner possible that the conception was miraculous: (1) "She was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (*v.* 18); (2) "For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (*v.* 20); (3) "And knew her not till she had

¹ For a full discussion of the text of S. Matthew i. 16 see note in Box, *The Virgin-Birth of Jesus*, pp. 215-18.

brought forth a son" (v. 25). The narrative opens with an introductory phrase, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise"—that indicates the Evangelist was recording what he considered to be historical fact. The story that follows is so simple and unaffected, so full of Hebraistic thought, that those who attribute it to pagan influence are making a demand on the credulity of the reader far greater than the acceptance of the narrative, as a true record, itself makes. Mary, we are told, was betrothed to Joseph. What is the force of "betrothed"? Among the Jews and other Orientals a considerable period elapsed between the betrothal and marriage. There was no religious ceremony at the betrothal, although it was held to "consecrate" the bride to the bridegroom. The betrothal could be effected in three ways: by a declaration made in the presence of witnesses accompanied by a pledge, by a written document, or by cohabitation.¹ It was customary for the betrothal to take place at the bride's house. S. Matthew does not say where this was, although it would be dangerous to argue from his silence that he did know with S. Luke that Mary lived at Nazareth. The betrothal was absolutely binding. The marriage in the case of virgins usually took place at the end of a year; when Joseph, according to S. Luke, took Mary to Bethlehem with him, he

¹ For full account of Jewish betrothal and marriage see Box, *The Virgin-Birth of Jesus*, Appendix II, pp. 209 ff. "If Joseph's home was in Bethlehem, by taking Mary his betrothed with him when he left Nazareth for his home-town, he was performing the central and public act which proclaimed marriage."—*Ibid.*, p. 214.

did all that was essential to marriage. S. Matthew states that during this period of betrothal, "before they came together," Mary "was found with child of the Holy Ghost."

Here it is plainly asserted that the conception was immaculate and miraculous. It is not to be understood in the sense that the Holy Spirit took the place of the human father—although the latter is entirely ruled out by the narrative—but it was God Himself acting through His Holy Spirit, Who by a divine intervention originated in Mary the source of a new kind of life. Such a divine irruption, it is to be observed, is consistent with the plan of the Bible. In the beginning, at the creation of the world, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"; when man was made, "the Lord breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"; so too the New Man is born "of the Holy Ghost." The teaching of modern philosophy would seem to assist us in at least accepting the credibility of a new birth of this kind. For no longer do philosophers regard the universe as "a closed system," but one rather into which new life—actually new life—is constantly being "breathed." The philosophic notion of "vitalism" would seem to accord well with the Birth of Jesus "of the Holy Spirit."¹

¹ "In this act the Spirit is seen presiding over the beginnings of a new creation. As in the beginning of cosmic life, as in the first quickening of the higher life in man, so at the outset of the new order which the Incarnation inaugurated, it belonged to the Divine Spirit to set in motion the great process which was to follow. . . . In the new world, in the New Man, as in the old, life begins with the Breath of God."—H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, p. 32.

Apparently Joseph knew nothing about the annunciation of Gabriel to Mary. S. Matthew does not mention it, and, as we have seen, this is most probably Joseph's account. According to both Evangelists the miraculous conception had already taken place before Joseph had even heard of the annunciation to Mary. The latter and the conception may have been simultaneous, but in any case it seems strange that Mary should have kept the matter back from Joseph. Dr. Nolloth remarks: "How could he be enlightened as to the truth of what was happening? Mary, if she knew what he was meditating, could not speak."¹ We here touch upon a mystery we shall never unravel. Mary, we know, kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart.

Yet it is natural to suppose that the secret was at least shared by Joseph; and he was so perturbed that he needed the message of the angel to guide him in his actions and to reassure him. His own reputation was at stake, and in spite of Mary's story he still required some confirmation of it. He was a righteous man; one who observed the law. His first inclination was to divorce her, since infidelity in the betrothed was every whit as serious as in the married. Two courses were open to him: to bring her before the courts to be judicially condemned and punished, or to put her away by a bill of divorcement without stating the cause. It was the latter course he was meditating upon when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. In S. Matthew the angel appears

¹ *The Rise of the Christian Religion*, p. 107.

in a dream as the vehicle of divine communication; in S. Luke the messages are transmitted directly by the angel. Most probably the dream of Joseph is not to be regarded as in any sense a miraculous manifestation of God's will, but, on the contrary, the message appears to have been communicated in a natural way. His subconscious mind, in which were stored up the deep impressions of this extraordinary fact—that Mary was with child—had turned this matter over and over again; and then when sleep came, and the ordinary waking consciousness was at rest, the subconscious mind, charged with these impressions, came to the surface, and having sifted and sorted unconsciously the facts and fears, made it all clear. The reference to the angel is most probably due to the current belief that messages were communicated in this way. Such experiences may have been ours, although we might use other expressions to describe them, and possibly offer a different explanation, not of their source, but of the manner of their communication. Some fresh knowledge came to Joseph, of which his waking conscious mind had not been aware. It was revealed to him in a dream by an angel. That is the Biblical way of putting it. The message to Joseph was indelibly impressed upon his memory that he never forgot it. In the Bible it is in poetical form, and should be so arranged.¹

¹ “Joseph, thou son of David,
Fear not to take unto thee,
Mary thy wife.
For that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit.

Such, then, is the record of the annunciation to Joseph. We have now to observe the Evangelist's comment. We have already seen that S. Matthew is anxious to show that the Messiah fulfilled prophecy. He quotes Isaiah vii. 14:—

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son,

“And they shall call his name Immanuel.”

To grasp the significance of this prophecy it is important to note its historical setting. Ahaz, the king, was alarmed because his enemies threatened to overthrow the House of David. Isaiah reassures Ahaz by giving a sign—the Virgin, she who is unmarried, shall bear a Son, and deliverance shall be wrought in order to show that God is with His people. The emphasis is upon Immanuel—“God with us.” There are two points of great importance in connection with this prophecy.

1. Lobstein, who, as we have already indicated, denies the fact of the Virgin-Birth, attributing it to “religious instinct,” writes: “The translators rendered the word *הַעַלְמָה*, which cannot mean virgin,¹ by *ἡ παρθένος*; thus they paved the way for the religious construction adopted by the Evangelist.”²

What language is S. Matthew quoting? Hebrew or Greek? In those days the Old Testament had

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His Name Jesus,

For He shall save His people from their sins.”

¹ cf. Canticles vi. 8 ff., and specially Prov. xxx. 19.

² *The Virgin-Birth*, p. 75.

been translated into Greek, and this version is known as the Septuagint (LXX). It is this version S. Matthew generally uses, although many of his citations are free renderings. The word translated ἡ παρθένος (virgin) in the LXX is הַעַלְמָה in the Hebrew. According to some scholars this word does not mean *virgin* necessarily, but simply a young woman of marriageable age. The word הַעַלְמָה is only twice translated παρθένος in the Greek version of the Old Testament.¹ In our English Bible it is only once translated virgin. It would be precarious to argue that הַעַלְמָה means virgin, because its derivation is uncertain. Nevertheless it is remarkable that the Evangelist should have hit upon this particular passage—the one relevant passage where the word is translated virgin.

2. Now it is said by Lobstein, Pfleiderer,² Selwyn, and others, that it was this passage that paved the

¹ Gen. xxiv. 43 ; Isa. vii. 14.

² Pfleiderer, as already pointed out, lays stress chiefly on pagan influences, but he thinks Isaiah vii. 14 had something to do with the foundation of the belief. "Afterward, the necessity of Old Testament proof for this became apparent, and it was thought that this non-Jewish notion, so far removed from the idea of God in the Old Testament, could be based on the passage in the book of the prophet Isaiah (vii. 14), which tells of the child to be expected by a young woman, and his name shall be Immanuel, symbolizing the nearness of God's help. Though the prophet thought neither of a miraculous birth nor of a future Messiah, the name Immanuel might easily suggest application to the Messiah Jesus (it is entirely foreign to Jewish theology); then some Christian who was not entirely familiar with the Hebrew might understand the Hebrew word *almah*, which means 'a young woman,' in the text of Isaiah, to mean 'a virgin' (which it may, but not necessarily must mean), and thus find in that passage a prophecy of the miraculous birth of the Messiah Jesus."—*Christian Origins*, p. 226.

way for, or actually gave rise to, the whole story of the Virgin-Birth. In other words, the Evangelist was so anxious to show that Christ fulfilled all prophecy that in this case he invented a story to fit in with the passage of Isaiah. Remember, however, that this Gospel was written for Jews. The chief purpose of the Evangelist was to commend Jesus to the Jews. The genealogy shows that Christ was the son of David, descended from Abraham. This would appeal to the Jews, for they expected the Messiah from David. But would he be likely to invent a story which was, so far as we know, entirely foreign to what the Jews expected? If the Jews had been taught to look for a Messiah born of a virgin mother, then the argument that the story was based upon the text of Isaiah might carry some weight. It would be conceivable that a writer, in order to commend Jesus, might have invented the story to show that He fulfilled all that the Jews hoped for; though to our minds such conduct would be dishonest. The evidence we possess, however, does not contain any suggestion that the Jews expected a virgin-born Messiah.

Now, if the Jews did not as a fact expect a Messiah born of a virgin, is it at all likely that the Evangelist would have gone out of his way to offend the Jews by inventing a story they could not believe? Does such conduct on the part of the writer show any consistency with the avowed purpose of his Gospel? If the Virgin-Birth was not a fact, then why should the writer have introduced it and thus

run the risk of alienating the Jews, whose sympathies he was trying to win? Surely it is more reasonable to argue that the writer was convinced of the *fact* of the supernatural conception—which he had already twice stated—and then, in order to commend it to the Jews, he points to the prophecy which they had ignored, or differently interpreted, which said Immanuel should be born of the Virgin. Or to put it another way. The fact of the Virgin-birth suggested a prophecy, but it is inconceivable for the reasons already stated to suppose that the prophecy could have led to the fabrication of the fact.¹ Whether עִלְמָה means strictly virgin or not does not matter very much. The remarkable thing is that the writer should have seized on the relevant passage where it is so translated in order to show that Christ fulfilled this prophecy.²

¹ Whether Isaiah himself had in mind a supernatural conception is another question. The point is the Jews did not so interpret the passage.

“There are signs that the view that Isaiah was using current mythological terms and intended הַעֲלָמָה to carry with it the sense of supernatural birth, is rightly regaining ground.”—Allen, *S. Matthew*, p. 10.

² Selwyn, who identified the “*logia*” with the “oracles,” the Messianic proof-texts, writes:—

“The doctrine of the Virgin-Birth itself arises directly from the oracle which Matthew quotes with his own introductory statement thus:

“‘Now all this is come to pass that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

“‘Behold the Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His Name Emmanuel [which is translated, God with us]’ (*Isa. vii. 14*).

“Previous writers, like Mark, some fifteen years before Matthew,

The name Immanuel, attributed by the Evangelist through the prophecy to our Lord, is significant indeed. It expresses fully the Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation. The Child, virgin-born, was none other than God Himself, Who came down from heaven to save His people.

(iii) THE BIRTH AT BETHLEHEM

The actual Birth of our Lord is very briefly touched upon by S. Matthew. He says nothing about the enrolment. Indeed the time, in the days of Herod the king—and place, Bethlehem, are mentioned for the purpose of introducing the visit of the Magi, and to show that in His birthplace the Messiah fulfilled prophecy. It would appear from S. Matthew's account that the home of Joseph and Mary was in Bethlehem, since no other place is named. Further, there is no indication that our Lord was born in a stable; the Wise Men came to the house (ii. 11). There is no mention of an inn. Considerations such as these have led some critics to distrust the historical character of the Gospel of the Infancy. Thus, for instance, J. M. Thompson writes: "S. Matthew,

had no room for the doctrine. S. Paul, thirty years before Matthew, ignored or did not know it. 'When the fullness of time [he refers to prophecy] came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law' (*Gal.* iv. 4). Here 'born of a virgin' would not have been inappropriate. And elsewhere he says, 'born of the seed of David *according to the flesh*' (*Rom.* i. 3), an expression that is hardly consistent with the doctrine that Mary was a virgin."—*First Christian Ideas*, p. 64.

then, is quite at variance with S. Luke as to the home of Joseph and Mary, and as to the circumstances under which the birth took place."¹

It is no doubt extremely difficult to reconcile S. Matthew and S. Luke in detail; but when we examine S. Luke's account we shall see how far this statement is correct. Here it is sufficient to observe that S. Matthew says Christ was born of a virgin at Bethlehem; and in this he is at one with S. Luke.

(iv) THE MAGI

The visit of the Magi to our Lord confronts us with a difficult question. Is this a historical fact or a legend? It is certainly a story that would appeal to the Jews. The thought of the Messiah receiving the homage of non-Jewish peoples would be very attractive, and was highly consistent with Jewish expectations. Here it might be concluded that the story, unlike that of the Virgin-Birth, was an invention. The visit of the Magi is recorded by S. Matthew alone, and therefore the narrative has to stand entirely on its own credibility. It might be asked, however, how could such an invention arise? It has been often pointed out that this narrative might have been composed entirely from Old Testament prophecies. Thus, for instance, "the star" is made dependent on the well-known passage of Numbers xxiv. 17: "There shall rise a star out of Jacob,

¹ *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 152.

and there shall be raised a sceptre out of Israel, and Edom shall be his inheritance."

The ordinary interpretation put upon this passage by the synagogue teachers was that it referred to the star which should herald the appearance of the Messiah. A parallelism too has been observed in this connection, between our Lord's life and that of Moses.¹ According to Josephus the birth of Moses was foretold by astrologers:—

"One of those sacred tribes, who are very sagacious in foretelling future events truly, told the king, that about this time there would a child be born to the Israelites, who if he were reared would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise the Israelites; that he would excel all men in virtue, and obtain a glory that would be remembered through all ages."²

The completest anticipation of the visit of the Magi, however, and the passage upon which some would urge the incident to be based, is in the Septuagint version of Isaiah lx. 1 ff.:—

"Lighten thou, lighten thou, Jerusalem, for *thy light* has come, and *the glory of the Lord* has arisen (*ἀνατέταλκεν*) upon thee. Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and blackness come upon the Gentiles, but upon thee *shall dawn* (*ἐπὶ δὲ σὲ φανησέται*, Epi-phany) the *Lord*, and His glory shall be seen upon thee; and *kings shall journey at thy light*, and *Gentiles at thy brightness*."

There is indeed a striking resemblance between this passage and the Matthaean account of the Magi's

¹ Exod. iv. 19-20.

² *Antiquities*, ii, 9, 2.

visit. Further, the gifts of gold, frankincense—and myrrh—are also predicted in Isaiah lx. 6:—

“All from Saba shall come bringing gold, and frankincense shall they bring; and they shall preach the gospel of the salvation of the Lord.”

There is no mention of myrrh, however, but in the reading of A (Codex Alexandrinus) there is added “and precious stone,” which in the Gospel account it is suggested was changed into “and myrrh.” To English ears there seems a wide difference in sound between the two gifts, but the Aramaic for “precious stone” or “precious thing” is *moq râ*, and for “myrrh,” *môrâ*. “And myrrh” arose therefore out of “and precious stone,” which the logiast Matthew had turned into Aramaic from the LXX.¹ The third gift should not therefore have been translated as myrrh, but a precious stone, an agate vase which was much more valuable than myrrh. It was not the logiast Matthew who was responsible for the disproportionate gifts mentioned in the Gospel, but the evangelist Matthew.

The quotations given above, and the interpretations put upon them, show at least the possibility of the visit of the Magi being drawn solely from Old Testament sources. But it is to be observed that considerable adaptation of the passages is required, and emendation of the text necessitated, for the prophecies to fit in precisely with the Gospel narrative. Why should this adaptation be necessary if the Gospel narrative was founded on the Old Testament oracles?

¹ See Selwyn, *First Christian Ideas*, p. 55.

What can be proved is that S. Matthew is capable of quoting the Old Testament freely in order to show that Christ fulfilled prophecy, but it cannot be proved that S. Matthew invented the facts to fit in with prophecy.¹

There is, nevertheless, no independent evidence for the visit of the Magi. We may ask, however, what marks does the narrative possess which suggest credibility?

In the first place the story harmonizes with the current expectations and hopes. The term Magi was first used in a technical sense as applying to the sacerdotal class in the Persian Empire. Its meaning later, however, was much extended, and in New Testament times it was used to describe all who practised magical arts; and apart from this one passage in the New Testament it is used in a bad sense.² Most probably S. Matthew intends the term to be understood as meaning wise men in a non-technical sense—oriental Magi who spent much time in making astrological forecasts. The language the Evangelist employs is too vague for us to identify with any degree of certainty either the precise class to which the Magi belonged or the place of their abode. Arabia, Persia, and Babylon have all been suggested—the last with the greatest measure of probability. What does seem clear is that they were Gentiles

¹ Prophecy may have influenced in some measure the *detail*, which is of no great importance. Thus S. Matthew xxi. 2, the *ass* is mentioned as well as the foal; and S. Matthew xxvii. 34, *gall* mingled with wine.

² Acts viii. 9, *Simon Magus*; Acts xiii. 6-8, *Elymas*.

who read the signs of the heavens. That such people existed there is no reason to doubt.

Why, then, should foreigners have undertaken this journey? There seems little doubt that there was a widespread expectation among people other than Jews that a Great One was about to be born, and the fact that in this case He was associated with the "King of the Jews" may be due to the influence of Jewish thought. The Jews were widely scattered, and wherever they went they took their religion and its hopes with them.

The "star" remains a problem for the astronomers. Very many suggestions have been put forward. That a "new star" did appear is by no means a discredited theory. From the point of view of chronology Kepler's calculation is extraordinarily attractive. Between 7 and 6 B.C. there was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn which would be marked by a special brilliance in the sky. If this theory is accepted, then after the conjunction a new star would appear. Dr. Moffatt writes:—¹

"It is curious that according to astronomical observations an important and rare conjunction of the planets (Jupiter and Saturn) did take place between April 15th and December 27th of 6 B.C., which may have led to acute speculation amongst Babylonian astrologers, who were accustomed to forecast the effects of such phenomena upon Syria. This may suggest a historical nucleus for the early Christian haggada of S. Matthew ii. 1-11."

¹ *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, p. 252

These are the grounds upon which the credibility of the story rests. They will not be regarded as sufficient by all. Nevertheless, they do suggest that underlying the narrative are certain facts upon which the Evangelist has built. Legend afterwards certainly played a part. From the sixth century onward the Magi were designated kings, and in the East were reckoned twelve in number, and in the West three. Bede has preserved their names: Kaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. It is interesting to observe how these names arose. They are based on Psalm lxxii. 10: "Kings of Tharsis and the isles shall offer gifts: Kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring gifts to him." Balthasar is the equivalent of "Kings of Tharsis." The first syllable, Bal, in Hebrew or Aramaic means "lord" (bê êl or bêl). Thasar has arisen from a transposition of the letters "r" and "s" (Thars to Thasr), due to the translation into Greek and finally into Latin. Melchior is the Aramaic Malchei—ârâv—"Kings of Arabia," while Kaspar is simply Kai Saba (and Saba).

Another difficulty in regard to the Magi is to know where to place the event. The traditional view is the thirteenth day—the Epiphany. Against this, however, there is a serious objection. S. Luke informs us that our Lord was circumcised on the eighth day, and if the "law of Moses" was strictly fulfilled, which S. Luke's narrative seems to suggest, then the purification at Jerusalem could not have taken place before the fortieth day. According to

the traditional view the visit of the Magi preceded the purification. Against this it has been urged that in view of Herod's intentions "Joseph and Mary would hardly have ventured to bring Him to the city."¹ There is no indication, however, in S. Matthew that the Magi informed Joseph and Mary of Herod's hostility, and the warning they received in a dream may have been after they had left the house of Joseph and Mary. What militates most forcibly against the traditional view is that S. Matthew's account implies that when the Magi were departed, Joseph himself was warned to take the young Child and the Mother into Egypt; and further, the narrative states that Joseph at once acted according to this warning. There seems, therefore, no interval between the visit of the Magi and the flight into Egypt when the purification could have taken place. We are therefore inclined to the view that the visit of the Magi took place after the purification. How long after is a matter of conjecture. S. Luke's account says that "when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth." It has therefore been suggested that after the purification the Holy Family returned to their own home at Nazareth, and then at a subsequent period paid another visit to Bethlehem, when the visit of the Magi took place. The fact that Herod had all the male children killed "from two years old and under, according to the time he had

¹ Plummer, *S. Luke*, p. 64.

carefully learned of the Wise Men," would seem to imply that our Lord might have been nearly two years old when the Magi visited Him. This would fit in with the view that the Holy Family paid a second visit to Bethlehem. The difficulty, however, in placing the date so late is the immediate connection in S. Matthew of the Birth of our Lord and the visit of the Wise Men. We suggest, therefore, that the visit of the Magi look place almost immediately after the purification.

The slaughter of the Innocents is quite in keeping with what we know of Herod's character, although no doubt this massacre has been much exaggerated by imagination. It was confined to the male children of "Bethlehem and all the borders thereof," and the number slain would not probably be very large.

(v) PROPHECIES

There are three quotations from the Old Testament introduced by S. Matthew into the narrative which call for notice. They are concerned with the Birth of our Lord at Bethlehem, the Flight into Egypt, and the Massacre of the Innocents. The first—

"And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah,
Art in no wise least among the princes of Judah,"
etc.,

is taken neither from the Hebrew nor Septuagint version of Micah v. 2. In the place of "Ephratah" in the original S. Matthew substitutes "land of Judah." He thus makes the prophecy of Micah

refer to a different Bethlehem from that which the prophet had in view. The earliest mention of Bethlehem is in Genesis xxxv. 19: "And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephratah which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day." This Bethlehem we know was near to Bethel,¹ whereas Bethlehem of Judaea was more than fourteen miles away. If Micah had meant by Ephratah "fruitful," which is etymologically its meaning, he still does not say it was in Judaea. Most probably Bethlehem Ephratah had disappeared by the time of the Gospels, and S. Matthew therefore changed the prophecy to Bethlehem of Judaea. This is instructive as showing that S. Matthew's plan was not to invent incidents in our Lord's life in order to show prophecy was fulfilled, but rather he modifies prophecy so that it will fit in with the record of events.²

It is extremely improbable that S. Matthew based the incident of the flight into Egypt upon the quotation from Hosea xi. 1, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Moreover, an independent tradition has been preserved of our Lord's visit to Egypt, and is referred to in the Talmud; while it was alleged by Celsus that in Egypt Christ learned to work magic.

The third quotation, "A voice was heard in Ramah," from Jeremiah xxxi. 15, although Ramah is a name frequently used, seems to confirm the view expressed above that S. Matthew changed the

¹ Gen. xxxv. 15.

² See note, p. 60.

ancient prophecy from Micah to harmonize with the facts of our Lord's life.

We may say, then, that S. Matthew, while casting the form of his narrative in a Hebrew mould, and adapting it to ancient models, nevertheless enshrined in the narrative what he believed to be actual facts. Throughout he is anxious to show that our Lord fulfilled prophecy; this latter he handles freely to fit in with the record he gives. The Virgin-Birth at Bethlehem is woven into the web and woof of the narrative; no amount of textual emendation can remove it. The visit of the Magi and the subsequent flight into Egypt, while in a measure made to conform with Hebrew modes of expression and fashioned upon Hebrew models, nevertheless bear marks of being genuine history. Nowhere in the narrative is there discernible any trace of pagan influence.

There is one other point that needs a brief explanation. Our Lord returned from Egypt after the death of Herod (4 B.C.) and dwelt at Nazareth. Here again S. Matthew refers to prophecies—although he does not specify which:—

“that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, that He should be called a Nazarene.”¹

What is the force of Nazarene? It has no connection with Nazirite. We know from the New Testament that our Lord's disciples were called Nazarenes by those hostile to them, because they

¹ S. Matt. ii. 23.

came from Nazareth. It was a term of contempt. The Jewish Christians, however, gave the term a quite different significance by associating it with the Hebrew word *nēzer*, meaning "branch or shoot," a Messianic title found in Isaiah xi. 1, or with the *nasôrai*, "my salvation," of Isaiah xlix. 6. Thus the Evangelist is playing upon the words Nazareth and Nazarene. From the despised Nazareth came the Nazarene—the Branch or the Saviour.

CHAPTER IV

S. Luke's Account of the Infancy

(i) THE ANNUNCIATION TO ZACHARIAS

WE have already pointed out the probable source of S. Luke's account of the Infancy. Ultimately this must have been derived from the Blessed Virgin herself. We have also observed that the narrative, unlike the prologue, is in Hebraistic Greek. This characteristic may be due either to S. Luke's stylistic skill, or, more naturally, to the fact that he was translating from a Hebrew document or documents. It has also been noticed that S. Luke's prologue implies as strongly as words can that he means to do his work thoroughly and with care. He has traced the course of all things from the beginning. He goes back behind the Birth of our Lord to the annunciation and birth of His great forerunner, John the Baptist. The scene opens with Zacharias, "a certain priest," burning incense in the Temple of the Lord. This would be the most solemn moment in his life, and none could have been more fitting for the angelic annunciation. The presence of Gabriel, however, struck terror into the heart of Zacharias, and the first words uttered by the angel were intended to allay his fears. "Fear not, Zacharias: because thy supplication is heard." It is obviously impossible to state with certainty what the content was of

Zacharias's supplication. We can but guess. The word used in the Greek implies *individual need*. It may well have been for a son, since his wife Elisabeth was barren. It is true that it was his duty to pray for the redemption of Israel; but, as now, priests who stand before the altar mingle their own private prayers with the Eucharistic Offering, so well might Zacharias. The angel states definitely that his petition was heard at the moment it was uttered. The words that follow seem most naturally to indicate that they are the answer to the supplication, "Thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." An appropriate name indeed!—"Jehovah's gift" or "Jehovah is gracious!" In a few vivid sentences the angel describes the vocation of this child. He is to be a Nazirite for life, and from his mother's womb will be filled with the power of the Holy Ghost. He is to make ready for the Lord a people prepared; that is to be his mission.

No doubt this account of the annunciation to Zacharias bears marks of similarity to the incidents surrounding the cradles of Samson and Samuel. All three were unexpected births. But surely it is absurd criticism which regards the annunciation to Zacharias as a piece of legend because of these resemblances, or as others argue, that it was the purpose of the Evangelist, in thus describing John's vocation, to subordinate him completely to the Christ. Such inferences are not drawn from an examination of the narrative, but are due rather to certain "pre-suppositions" from which advanced critics find it

hard to dispossess themselves. That the narrative is in accordance with Old Testament thought and phraseology is inevitable. In form it is dependent upon earlier models, as we found to be the case in S. Matthew. But this does not brand the narrative as legendary. On the contrary, it is almost inconceivable that one writing seventy years after the events described could have invented the story in the form we have it. In one important particular, however, the child to be born differs from the Old Testament characters of Samson and Samuel; he is to be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. That is to be the source of his strength. It is true that he is subordinated to the Christ; yet "he shall be great." Greatness, after all, is a matter of degree; and there is a grandeur and dignity surrounding the annunciation of John's birth unsurpassed except by the annunciation to the Blessed Virgin herself.

The sign given to Zacharias was in the nature of a punishment, as the angel's words clearly state—"because thou believedst not my words." Was this punishment unjust? This question has often been asked and debated especially in connection with Mary's "How shall this be?" We shall return to it again. Here, however, it is sufficient to point out that Zacharias was a priest, and on this occasion offering the most solemn service to God. Moreover, if the interpretation given above is correct, then his supplication included a prayer for a son. The immediate answer surprised him; but his question

betrayed a lack of faith, and the sign he received was of such a nature that his faithlessness was made evident.

(ii) THE ANNUNCIATION TO MARY

We now pass to an examination of the annunciation made to the Blessed Virgin Mary at Nazareth. This involves a careful consideration of an "interpolation" which a very large number of learned scholars allege to have been inserted in the text. At the outset it must be admitted that so far as explicit references to the miraculous conception are concerned S. Luke is less convincing than S. Matthew. In the latter the Virgin-Birth is woven into the texture of the whole narrative; in S. Luke it is confined to one verse. Nevertheless, the cumulative impression of S. Luke's account, with its reiterated insistence upon the Holy Ghost, and the outbursts of prophecy, is grander and more "supernatural" than S. Matthew's.

What is this alleged interpolation? It is argued by a host of critics that verses 34 and 35, "And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God"—are a later interpolation of S. Luke or some editor, and that if these verses are omitted then there is no direct evidence for the Virgin-Birth. Those who suspect these verses are

not altogether in agreement. Thus some reject them altogether as no true part of the narrative: others treat them as a later insertion by S. Luke or the final redactor of the Gospel, when the truth of the Virgin-Birth became known. If the former view is taken, then S. Luke's Gospel has no evidence of the Virgin-Birth; if the latter, then S. Luke or the editor only became acquainted with the story after the Gospel had been written.

The reasons for regarding these verses as an interpolation are as follows¹:—

1. Mary's question (*v.* 34), "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" is objected to on two grounds:

(a) It is unintelligible on the lips of a maiden already betrothed.

(b) The similarity of Mary's question to Zacharias's is contrasted with the treatment they received from the angel.

2. Verse 36 is said to follow more naturally verse 33. Thus, "And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end. And behold Elisabeth," etc.

3. Jesus has already been called the Son of the Most High (*v.* 32). It is suggested therefore that verse 35 is a doublet of verse 32. "The Son of the Most High" becomes the "Most High" and the "Son of God."

4. If these verses are omitted, then the first two chapters of S. Luke are consistent in regarding Jesus

¹ The MS. authority for these verses is overwhelming.

as the natural son of Joseph : ii. 33, "his father and his mother" ; ii. 41, "his parents" ; ii. 48, "Thy father and I."

Let us examine these arguments in turn.

1. Mary's question has proved a stumbling-block to dozens of modern critics. It is alleged that it is remarkable that one already betrothed and soon to be married should express surprise at the thought of becoming a mother. This question, therefore, falling so unnaturally from the lips of Mary, must be an interpolation for the express purpose of introducing the verse that follows, which contains the only definite statement of the Virgin-Birth in this Gospel. Before, however, we can regard this verse as an interpolation (even by S. Luke) Mary's question must be proved to be intrinsically incredible.

We suggest that the critics have approached the question from a fundamentally mistaken point of view. It is primarily a psychological problem, and not one that can be solved by literary criticism. It is significant that the critics who have found in this question an insuperable difficulty have been invariably men. It has already been pointed out that throughout this narrative there is a womanly spirit, and for its proper understanding something of the psychology of the female adolescent must be grasped. Indeed it is extremely probable that the annunciation to Mary, with all the emotions it would arouse in one *already betrothed*, can only be fully appreciated by a woman. To attempt to elucidate the true meaning

of this question without full regard to the womanly spirit is to create a difficulty where none really exists. The marvellous character of the Son announced by the angel, the epithet applied—the Son of the Most High—made it clear that Mary was to become the mother of the Messiah. This in itself would cause an expression of profound astonishment to escape the Virgin's lips. This is agreed on all hands as natural. But would it account for the form the question assumes—"How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" At first sight this might seem remarkable, as Mary was already betrothed; but it becomes intelligible if we bear in mind the construction a betrothed maiden was likely to put upon the angel's message. She is to bear a son. This thought would arouse within her strong womanly emotions and sentiments. The impression such an annunciation would make would be that the conception had in fact already taken place, or at least was more immediate than her present condition could make possible. Whether she interpreted the angel's words correctly or not, that was the cumulative impression it would make. It was the *origin* of this conception, already accomplished or imminent, that puzzled her. The only conception she could think of was through man's agency: but this did not fit in with the facts. Hence the question, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"

It is not suggested that the annunciation itself, when we now examine it word by word, divorced from the intensely womanly emotions it would arouse,

contains any expression of immediate conception. Our argument is that that was the impression it made upon the Virgin; and further, it is highly probable that if we translated the annunciation into modern speech and terms of thinking it would still elicit a similar response on the part of a betrothed maiden. Mary was not conscious of being in that condition she understood the angel's message to imply.

Dr. Box has made the interesting suggestion that the words "Thou shalt conceive" in the original Hebrew would indicate immediate conception, and should be rendered "Thou art conceiving now."¹ If this could be *proved* then the question would be intelligible and support the view given above. Dr. Box's interpretation, however, is based upon two assumptions, neither of which can be proved absolutely. In the first place, while it is extremely probable, as has been pointed out, that S. Luke was translating from Hebrew documents, this cannot be regarded as an established fact; and secondly, it is open to question whether "Thou shalt conceive" would imply in the Hebrew original a present tense.² Further, if the annunciation and conception were simultaneous, how are we to explain S. Luke ii. 21: "His Name was called Jesus, which was so called by the angel *before* He was conceived in the womb"?

As observed above, the interpretation of the ques-

¹ *The Virgin-Birth of Jesus*, p. 38.

² This point is fully discussed in V. Taylor, *The Virgin-Birth*, pp. 38-9.

tion involves a psychological study. The impression left on Mary's mind was that she had already conceived or was soon to conceive. It was this abnormal immediacy that troubled her.

The second objection to the genuineness of this verse is that while there is a marked similarity in the form of the question and that asked by Zacharias, he was punished, while Mary received a fuller revelation, and later is "blessed for believing." "The presumption is that the two cases do not emanate from the same cycle of tradition."¹ Now while it is true the questions are strikingly similar, the circumstances in which they were asked were quite different. From the context of S. Luke i. 13, as already pointed out, it seems at least probable that Zacharias had actually included in his prayers a petition for a son. He is therefore punished because he not only doubted the angel's word, but did not believe his own prayer could be answered. Mary's question was a spontaneous utterance, called forth by the exceptional circumstances in which she unexpectedly found herself. As soon as the angel explains the origin of the conception her faith is evident. "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord."

2. So far we have seen no valid reason for regarding verses 34 and 35 as an interpolation. But then it is argued that verses 36 and 37 follow 33 more naturally. "The whole speech² is a consistent passage."³ Is it?

¹ V. Taylor, *The Virgin-Birth*, p. 43.

² S. Luke i. 30-33, 36, 37. ³ V. Taylor, *The Virgin-Birth*, p. 41.

The line of argument we have advanced is that the annunciation (vv. 28-33) does not imply any miraculous conception—i.e. in its literary form. There is no phrase which, taken in its literal and grammatical sense, suggests any conception other than a natural one. *The emphasis in these verses 28-33 is not upon the nature of the conception, but upon the greatness of the Child to be born. The root idea is the character of the Messiah. Verses 36 and 37, on the other hand, express a totally different idea. It is not the greatness of Elisabeth's son that is emphasized—this is not hinted at—but the remarkable character of the conception.* "She also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that was called barren." Moreover, the verse that follows—"For no word from God shall be void of power"—clearly indicates the Source from Whom such exceptional conceptions emanate. If the annunciation to Mary (vv. 28-33) had included some clear expression of a miraculous conception, then verses 36 and 37 might be said to follow naturally. As it is, they express an idea not found in the annunciation.

We therefore submit that verses 36 and 37 follow naturally verses 34 and 35. The whole speech¹ is *not* a consistent passage. Indeed those who argue for the omission or later interpolation of verses 34 and 35 should, if consistent, argue on the same grounds for the elimination of verses 36 and 37. Unless these verses follow verses 34 and 35 they are unintelligible.

¹ S. Luke i. 30-33, 36 and 37.

3. Now let us look at verse 35, which contains the only explicit reference to the miraculous conception. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God." Exception is taken to this verse because the Messiah is here regarded as the divine Son by virtue of His origin, whereas in verse 32 His Sonship is by adoption. It is therefore argued that it is impossible that one writer should in the same context describe the Sonship in such different terms; verse 35 is therefore a doublet of verse 32. But surely this is subjective criticism of little value. It implies that the narrative is the free composition of S. Luke or some editor, and that he "puts" these phrases—of such tremendous import—into the angel's mouth. Dr. Box, commenting on this verse, has truly written:—

"The two ideas are not mutually exclusive. At the same time, it is difficult to see what can have suggested such an otherwise un-Jewish application of the term 'son' in such a context, and amid language, so Hebraistic, except the actual occurrence of the fact narrated."¹

It is sometimes argued that S. Luke first wrote his Gospel without any knowledge of the Virgin-Birth, and that when he became acquainted with it he inserted it. This would account for the alleged interpolation of verses 34 and 35; and would not of itself weaken the evidence for the Virgin-

¹ *The Virgin-Birth of Jesus*, pp. 39-40.

Birth.¹ In addition, however, to the objections already advanced against the theory of interpolation, there is the whole plan of the narrative. Dr. Stanton writes:—

“I am directly concerned here only with the theory that the miraculous conception has been introduced through the revision of the original narrative. It does not appear to me that this can be worked out in an intelligible manner so as to accord with the literary phenomena as a whole. It is true that the miraculous conception is expressly referred to only in i. 34, 35. But no simple expedient, such as that of treating these verses as an interpolation, would meet the case. Throughout these two chapters there is a carefully constructed parallelism between the birth and infancy and early years of the Baptist and of Jesus. The angelic prediction of the birth of Jesus (i. 34, 35) corresponds with that of John (i. 8 ff.); the prophecies on the occasion of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple (ii. 22 ff.) correspond with those at the circumcision of John (i. 59 ff.), and so forth. Thus the miraculous conception seems to be a necessary stone in the structure; it is hard to see what could have stood in the place of it. The birth of John was out of the ordinary course of nature, and the whole purport of the narrative seems to require that the birth of the Messiah should be more wonderful still.”²

¹ This is the argument of V. Taylor, *The Virgin-Birth*.

² *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, Part ii, p. 226.

4. The references to "His parents," "father and mother," "Thy father and I," would seem at first sight to be inconsistent with a virgin-birth. S. Luke has just described a miraculous conception, yet Joseph is twice designated the father of Jesus. Can this be explained except on the hypothesis that the Virgin-Birth was an after-thought? It is true S. Luke might have avoided all ambiguity by using in the place of father, Joseph. Is it possible that the writer of these verses believed in the Virgin-Birth?

Let us look at these verses more closely (ii. 27, "the parents"; ii. 33, "his father and his mother"; ii. 41 and ii. 43, "his parents"; ii. 48, "Thy father and I"). It is generally conceded that ii. 48, being an address to the Child Jesus, could not have been differently worded. No doubt the Child had been taught to call Joseph "father." In ii. 27, ii. 41, and ii. 43, Joseph and Mary are described as "parents"; but this term need not imply physical parentage on the part of both Joseph and Mary. Had Joseph been the step-father of Jesus, this term would have been appropriate. There is then only one verse in these two chapters where Joseph is described in a sense that would indicate he was the natural father of Jesus. If we adopted the line of argument the critics advance in regard to verses 34 and 35, we should say "His father" being inconsistent with the rest of the narrative must be changed to "Joseph." No such emendation, however, is needed. S. Luke, having described the conception as miraculous,

leaves the reader to interpret the narrative in the light of it.

Critics have seized upon these apparent discrepancies and magnified them out of all proportion. That Joseph was commonly believed to be the father of Jesus is clear from several passages in the Gospels, where the Evangelists faithfully report the current opinion. That is a mark of the genuineness of the Gospels. But it is extremely doubtful whether S. Luke regarded such a phrase as "His father and His mother" as inconsistent with the miraculous conception he had just described. Most probably this was the phrase in his sources, and in view of the annunciation he did not hesitate to translate it literally, leaving its interpretation to the common sense of his readers. Those who argue that i. 34, 35 was an interpolation by S. Luke have to explain why he did not alter these ambiguous phrases. That neither his Gospel nor the Acts received a final revision is more than likely, but if in these chapters the inconsistencies are so glaring as some believe, it is remarkable that S. Luke did not remove them: for this he could have done in a few minutes.

We have gone over the arguments against the authenticity of these verses (34, 35) and offer as a conclusion that from the first they formed an integral part of the Gospel. Where a difficulty exists in the text of the New Testament the simplest thing is either to reject the offending passage absolutely, or to argue it is an interpolation. In

this case we feel the difficulty is imaginary rather than real, and the arguments for rejection or interpolation are far from convincing.

(iii) THE VISITATION

The visitation of the Blessed Virgin to Elisabeth, her "kinswoman," raises two interesting questions: (1) What was the motive of her journey? (2) What are we to think of the *Magnificat*?

In regard to the first of these questions it would be natural to suppose that Mary undertook the journey in order to convey her congratulations to Elisabeth, and also to acquaint her with the wonderful tidings she had herself received. Both of these considerations seem to have been included in the motive, although the latter is not generally accepted. "When Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, *the babe leaped in her womb.*" This latter expression strongly supports the contention that the salutation included the message of the angel Gabriel. Dr. Plummer, however, writes: "It is improbable that in her salutation Mary told Elisabeth of the angelic visit."¹ But what, after all, would be more natural? The theme of the women's conversation is readily inferred, and upon psychological grounds it is highly improbable that Mary was silent. She had indeed been chosen as the mother of the Messiah, but there is no indication that she forfeited thereby her womanly instincts. The song of Elisabeth that follows

¹ *S, Luke*, p. 28,

becomes more intelligible if the annunciation to Mary was included in the salutation.

"Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

"And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come unto me?

"... and blessed is she that believed."

No doubt this song has been modified, but it rests upon a basis of fact. The knowledge on the part of Elisabeth might be ascribed to the Holy Ghost; this, however, seems improbable. The song is none the less inspired, even though based upon the Virgin's message.

There are two points that must be briefly touched upon in regard to the *Magnificat*—(1) Who said it? (2) Was it a spontaneous utterance?

In regard to the first question opinion is much divided. All the Greek MSS. attribute it to Mary, while some Latin MSS. assign it to Elisabeth. On internal grounds it harmonizes well with Mary. Verse 48—"all generations shall call me blessed"—seems to refer back to Elisabeth's song, and verse 49 is reminiscent of the angel's message.¹ Further, it

¹ "Those who would read or gloss 'Elisabeth' seem to me to have overlooked the fact that the whole passage (*S. Luke* i. 41-55) is the record of a conversation consisting of Mary's salutation, Elisabeth's eloquent address and question, and Mary's answer. Elisabeth's question is 'And whence is this to me . . . ?' followed by the words about the joy of her unborn babe and the ascription of 'blessedness' to Mary. The answer to this question and to this ascription of blessedness is the *Magnificat*, with its verbal reference to the loving speech of Elisabeth: 'all generations shall call me blessed.'"—Note by Bishop John Wordsworth in *Niceta of Remesiana* (edit. A. E. Burn), p. clvi.

preserves the balance of the narrative if Mary also utters a song. Most probably the original version read, "and she said," and the name Mary has been added as a gloss, but one indicating true psychological insight.

"There can, indeed, be no doubt that Mary is intended to be the real centre of the picture; if she is deprived of the *Magnificat*, she is left on this occasion absolutely silent. . . . Our conclusion then is, that we need have little hesitation in believing the ordinary view to be correct. It is by no means certain that the accepted reading is wrong; and even if we assume an original 'and she said,' it will still remain probable that S. Luke intended Mary to be understood as the speaker of the *Magnificat*."¹

The second question is whether the *Magnificat* was a spontaneous utterance, or a composition based upon some utterance of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is extremely difficult to suppose that Mary could have composed a song of this character extempore. It contains order, symmetry, and a style which suggest careful composition, and these are scarcely compatible with spontaneous expression. Most probably Mary uttered a song based upon the song of Hannah—which, again, was not a spontaneous composition—and this was revised by S. Luke. We may say, then, that the substance of the *Magnificat* is Mary's, but not in the form we now possess it.

¹ C. W. Emmet, *The Eschatological Question in the Gospels and other Studies in New Testament Criticism*, pp. 175-87.

This observation applies generally to the songs in S. Luke's Gospel.

"These songs which have been selected for use in the Gospel of Luke doubtless represent reflection upon these events by Christian poets. . . . But the inspired author of the Gospel vouches for their propriety and for their essential conformity to truth and fact."¹

(iv) THE DATE OF THE NATIVITY

We pointed out in Chapter I that S. Luke has been accused of a great historical blunder. S. Luke ii. 1, 2 reads:—

"Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria."

The arguments advanced against the accuracy of these statements are as follows:—

1. Augustus did not order any general enrolment or census. S. Luke confused the date of Christ's Birth with the census of the year A.D. 6.²

2. If Augustus had ordered a census it would not have extended to Palestine, because at that time Palestine was independent of Augustus. Herod the king was not subordinate to Augustus.

3. There was no need for Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem, since the Romans numbered people where they were.

¹ Briggs, *The Messiah of the Gospels*, pp. 42, 43. ² Acts v. 37.

4. There was no census in Judaea until A.D. 6.

5. Quirinius was not governor of Syria during the lifetime of Herod.

Let us examine these arguments in turn.

1. Augustus did not order a general enrolment. Recent researches, especially in Egypt, have shown that there were periodic enrolments every fourteen years. Some of the census papers have been discovered belonging to the following dates: A.D. 20, 34, 48, 62, . . . 104. If we date back from A.D. 20 fourteen years we reach the date of the *great* census mentioned in the Acts, A.D. 6; while if we go one step further we should reach the year 8 B.C.—a date that would fit in very well as the date of Christ's Birth. If this fourteen-year cycle is correct, then it is highly probable that S. Luke's dating is also correct.

What evidence is there that these enrolments began when Augustus was emperor (27 B.C. to A.D. 14)? There is no direct evidence at present. Nevertheless, as Ramsay has pointed out:—

“The presumption is strengthened that the Egyptian fourteen years' cycle has its root in a principle of wider application. This brings us very near to Luke's statement that Augustus laid down a general principle of taking census of the whole Roman world. The supposition that his statement is true has now ceased to be out of keeping with extra-scriptural evidence. On the contrary, Luke's statement supplies the missing principle which holds together and

explains and makes consistent all the rest of the evidence."¹

This "presumption" of Ramsay's has been further strengthened by recent discoveries. The editors of *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* write:—

"Professor Ramsay is on firm ground when he justifies from his evidence of Egyptian papyri S. Luke's statement that Augustus started, in part at any rate of the Roman world, a series of periodic enrolments in the sense of numberings of the population; and since the census which is known to have taken place in Syria in A.D. 6-7 coincides with the enrolment year in Egypt, if we trace back the fourteen-year cycle one step beyond, . . . it is a very probable hypothesis that the numbering described by S. Luke was consistent with a general census held in 10-9 B.C. Moreover, the papyri are quite consistent with S. Luke's statement that this was the first enrolment."²

We may confidently state, then, that the result of recent research had been to strengthen very greatly the Lukan statement that the first enrolment took place under Augustus.

In addition to this evidence there is also some testimony derivable from the early Christian Fathers. Thus Clement of Alexandria knew from his own experience in Egypt that such periodic enrolments were made, while Tertullian speaks of an enrolment by Sentius Saturninus, Governor of Syria from

¹ *Was Christ born at Bethlehem?* p. 165.

² Grenfell and Hunt, Vol. II, ccliv, pp. 207 ff.

9-6 B.C.¹ Although this latter in point of name contradicts Luke's statement, yet it supports the fact that a census was taken at that time.

While therefore it cannot be positively proved that a census took place under Augustus, the evidence we possess makes it highly probable.²

2. Palestine, not being a part of the Roman Empire, would not have been included in such a census. When S. Luke says all the world should be enrolled, he refers to the Roman Empire. At this time it is true Palestine was not a province, but nevertheless Augustus did have some control, as is shown in the matter of taxation. He could not impose taxation directly, but—

“When Palestine was divided among Herod's three sons, Augustus ordered that the taxes of the Samaritans should be reduced by one-fourth, because they had not taken part in the revolt against Varus; and this was before Palestine became a Roman province.”³

3. There was no need for Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem. It does indeed seem extraordinary that they should have been compelled to travel so far if for purposes of taxation. It is, however, probable that this “first” enrolment of Palestine had no direct connection with taxation. Why was it Joseph and

¹ Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* iv, 19.

² “The imperial census, which was so prominent an institution in the second century A.D., with its elaborate returns of land and owners, was but a development of the census taken by Augustus's orders in his own provinces.”—Pelham, *Outlines of Roman History*, p. 385. One of the authorities cited is S. Luke ii. 1.

³ Plummer, *S. Luke*, p. 49.

Mary went to Bethlehem? It seems clear that Joseph's home was in Bethlehem, and the reason for his return can be explained as follows. Herod, as already pointed out, had a large measure of independence. He did his utmost to keep on good terms with both the Jews and the Romans. He left the former, as far as possible, to manage their own affairs. He did not interfere with the priestly services, and in some measure won the affection of the Jews by building their temple. He was also very anxious not to offend Augustus. Unfortunately, however, he went to war against the Arabians, and thus annoyed Augustus. The latter wrote to Herod saying that whereas he had treated him as a friend, he must now regard him as a subject. This letter was probably written about 8 B.C. In consequence of this event Augustus ordered the Jewish people to take an oath of fidelity to him. Six thousand Pharisees refused and were fined. It is very probable that this defiance led Augustus to extend the census of Syria to Palestine. Herod naturally would not be anxious for such an enrolment to take place; it would probably stir up Jewish sentiment and lead to rebellion. The Jews might quite reasonably think that the purpose of the enrolment was to obtain money, or to enlist men for the Roman armies. In the absence of any other evidence it might be conjectured that Herod arranged the census himself in a way that would not offend the Jewish people. The Romans would not object to this, since they always had respect for national customs. The census, therefore,

took place on tribal lines. All who were Jews had to go to their native cities. Augustus may have wanted to know the military strength of Palestine and the proportion of Jews to non-Jews. This, as pointed out, is conjectured, but it has received confirmation from a papyrus recently discovered and dated A.D. 104.

"It is a rescript from the Prefect of Egypt requiring all persons who were residing out of their own homes to return to their homes in view of the approaching census.

"The papyri also show that the census authorities ordered every one to return to their city or village to be enrolled. Luke's statement regarding Joseph and Mary is an interesting record of an early and partial application of the principle of Roman law which, in a later development, forbade certain classes to leave their home, tied the cultivator to the soil, and evolved the serf of mediaeval Europe."¹

The journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem for the enrolment, therefore, fits in with what we know of Roman administration.

The precise time for the census was probably fixed or else Joseph and Mary would not have made the journey when they did. It is reasonable to suppose that it was not in the winter, when travelling would be difficult. The traditional date, December 25th, for the Birth of Christ has been held from the fourth century.

4. Was Quirinius governor of Syria at this time?

¹ See article in *Discovery*, No. 4, April, 1920, by Professor W. M. Calder, "The Date of the Nativity."

From the above it is inferred that our Lord was born in the year 8 B.C. Who was then governor of Syria? The dates of the known governors are as follows:—

B.C. 9-6. Sentius Saturninus.

B.C. 6-4. Quinctilius Varus.

A.D. 6. Quirinius was governing Syria.

Mommsen, the famous historian, argued that Quirinius was governor of Syria for the first time between 3-2 B.C. S. Luke, it is to be observed, does not say that Quirinius actually took the census, but only that it occurred during his governorship. The word in Greek, translated "governor," might mean an official in a high capacity, but not necessarily the governor. What evidence is there that Quirinius held any office in Syria during the years 10-7 B.C.? Ramsay has shown that he was an important official in Syria at this time. An inscription found on the site of ancient Antioch describes him as chief magistrate.¹ It has also been shown that Quirinius was engaged in a war against the Homonades, and was in chief command of the armies. During this period the actual governor of Syria was Saturninus, as mentioned by Tertullian. Quirinius was the military director. Why did S. Luke put Quirinius instead of Saturninus? Tertullian derived his information from official sources, whereas S. Luke, whose traditional home was Antioch, would have been much more familiar with the name of Quirinius, the brilliant soldier and magistrate.

This accumulative evidence bears testimony to the

¹ Ramsay in *Expositor*, Nov., 1912, p. 402.

general accuracy of S. Luke's statement. He may indeed have made a mistake in regard to the name of the governor, but this is only a slip in a technical detail.

(v) THE BIRTH AT BETHLEHEM

Both S. Matthew and S. Luke state that our Lord was born at Bethlehem ; it is one of the two facts in which both Evangelists concur. S. Matthew mentions the birth apparently in order to introduce the visit of the Magi. S. Luke describes the birth in some detail.

It would appear from S. Luke that Joseph's home was at Bethlehem, and Mary's at Nazareth. At the time of the enrolment Joseph was on a visit to his affianced bride at Nazareth. The decree called him back, and, bearing in mind Mary's condition, he was obliged to take her with him. That Joseph or Mary possessed property in Bethlehem is extremely improbable, if we may judge from the dire straits in which they found themselves on arrival. S. Luke informs us that "while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

These verses raise a number of interesting and important discussions. The Child Jesus is described as Mary's firstborn Son. This phrase, while it might seem to imply that Mary bore other children to Joseph, cannot be regarded as decisive in the vexed

question of the precise relationship to our Lord of the brothers and sisters mentioned in the Gospels.¹ It is true that S. Luke might have avoided all ambiguity by substituting "only-begotten" for "first-born"; but most probably, as has been pointed out by Dr. Selwyn, S. Luke, when he described Jesus as "the firstborn," had in mind, not the question of subsequent children, but "he is declaring a solemn title on which S. Paul had already dwelt"; and the correct rendering in S. Luke should be "she brought brought her Son, the firstborn."²

It is difficult to conclude from S. Luke's account where precisely our Lord was born. He was laid in a manger, because there was no room in the inn. The Greek word (κατάλυμα), here translated "inn," means "a place where burdens are let down for rest." Hence it may have been a shed, and because there was no other available accommodation the Child was laid in a manger. The same word is, however, elsewhere used by S. Luke to indicate a guest-chamber, and this on the whole seems the most likely inter-

¹ A full discussion of this question does not fall within the scope of this book. According to the New Testament there were four brethren and two sisters (at least) who lived with Mary and our Lord. What their exact relationship to our Lord was it is impossible to determine. There are three views commonly put forward. (1) They were all the children of Joseph and Mary (Helvidian); (2) they were the children of Joseph by a former wife—thus step-brothers and sisters of our Lord (Epiphanian); (3) they were our Lord's first cousins—the children of the Virgin's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas (Hieronymian). In our opinion (2) is the most probable.—See article "Brethren of the Lord," *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*.

² *First Christian Ideas*, p. 77.

pretation. If Bethlehem was Joseph's home, then he may have relied upon the hospitality of a friend's guest-chamber. Unfortunately upon their arrival Joseph and Mary found it already occupied, and recourse had to be had to some meaner building, wherein was a manger. There is, however, another strongly-attested tradition that our Lord was born in a cave, and this is by no means improbable. No doubt the crowded state of Bethlehem has been much exaggerated. But if our Lord's Birth took place on the occasion of one of the Jewish feasts, then the fact that the "inn" was full is easily accounted for; and although the census would not involve a serious moving of the population, yet as a large number of the Jews then residing in Palestine were of Judah and Benjamin "all the towns and villages of Judah would be very full."

The angelic message to the shepherds and their visit to our Lord are so thoroughly Hebraistic in their setting that the suggestion the narrative is based upon a "foundling legend" seems incredible. The shepherds were not, most probably, ordinary shepherds, but those whose special duty it was to guard the flocks intended for the Temple sacrifices. They might well have been men with much more than ordinary spiritual insight and vision. There was something peculiarly sacred about their vocation, and it was singularly fitting that the birth of One Who ever afterwards has been known as the Good Shepherd should have been so revealed. S. Luke's record of this annunciation is one of the most

precious of all Christian stories. Based as we believe upon fact, no doubt it has been to some extent remodelled by the author.

There are two points in this narrative that call for attention: first, the angel's song. This should be arranged as in the Revised Version.

"Glory to God in the highest,

"And on earth peace among men in whom He is pleased."

Even in the English rendering the parallelism is clearly seen — "in the highest," "and on earth," "glory" and "peace," "God," and "men in whom He is pleased," balance each other.

The second is the "wonder" of all who heard "the things which were spoken unto them by the shepherds." It is alleged that this "wonder" on the part of Joseph and Mary, who are included in the "all," is inconsistent with a miraculous conception, and further, S. Luke would not have written these words had he held the belief. In the first place it is improbable that the "all" includes Joseph and Mary, but refers rather to those who subsequently heard the news. But even if Joseph and Mary are included, surely the criticism betrays a lack of psychological insight. The shepherds' story of the angelic annunciation might well have set Joseph and Mary "wondering," even though they knew all. The following verse, however, beginning with an emphatic "but," would seem to contrast Mary's attitude to that of those who wondered: "She kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart."

(vi) CIRCUMCISION AND PURIFICATION

As a loyal son of Abraham the Child was circumcised on the eighth day, and "His Name was called Jesus." This and the account given of John's circumcision constitute the chief scriptural evidence we possess that the "naming" accompanied circumcision.

The purification and presentation refer to two distinct ceremonies. The former was "according to the law of the Lord." Forty days after childbirth it was enjoined that the woman should bring to the priest "a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtle-dove, for a sin offering. . . . And if her means suffice not for a lamb, then she shall take two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons."¹ The sacrifice that they brought was that of the poor, and was for the purification, and had no connection with the presentation. In the Old Testament no reference is made to the husband, but in S. Luke's account we read, "when the days of *their* purification . . . were fulfilled." The plural pronoun might refer to Mary and the Child, or to Mary and Joseph. The grammatical construction is certainly in favour of the latter, and the underlying thought may be, as Dr. Plummer points out, that "contact with an unclean person involved uncleanness."² The signification of the presentation, which is clearly the fact the Evangelist has chiefly in mind, is not easy to determine.

¹ Lev. xii. 6-8.² S. Luke, p. 63.

Unfortunately we possess no knowledge of the ceremony of presentation. In S. Luke's account it is closely connected with the redemption of the first-born, as the quotations from Exodus make evident. All the male firstborn were "holy to the Lord," but since their priestly functions had been transferred to the tribe of Levi they had to be redeemed for service in the sanctuary by the payment of five shekels. This usually took place on the thirtieth day. There was no need for Mary to go to the Temple, but being so near it was natural for her to do so. The presentation to the Lord most probably preceded or accompanied the payment of the redemption money; and such a solemn presentation of the Child Jesus was, we feel, an act highly congruous with the high destiny that was His.

These technical points have not, perhaps, more than an archaic interest for us; but some slight consideration of them is essential in order to gauge the accuracy of S. Luke's record.

Within the Temple courts we are introduced to two remarkable characters, Simeon and Anna. The former, "righteous and devout," looking for the consolation of Israel, had received the revelation that he should not die until he had seen the "Lord's Christ." Now that he has beheld the Messiah he utters his parting hymn, the *Nunc Dimittis*, which has been used by Christians in the evening service for some 1,500 years. Joseph and Mary marvel at the things that are said concerning their Son, for the song of Simeon, so universal in its range, surpassed

even the annunciation made to the shepherds. But the "salvation" of which Simeon spoke was to be wrought through suffering, and a sword was to pierce through the soul of the Blessed Virgin.

Anna is a type of womanly devotion that still persists. She "departed not from the Temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day." She too gave thanks that the Deliverer had come.

S. Luke brings to a close this sacred scene in our Lord's life with the statement, "And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth."

Some consider that the inference to be drawn from this verse is that the Holy Family at once returned to Nazareth, and that the visit of the Magi therefore occurred at a later date when Bethlehem was revisited. This is not improbable; but S. Luke's "had accomplished all things" is a somewhat elastic phrase and does not preclude the immediate return to Bethlehem.

(vii) THE BOYHOOD OF CHRIST

The Gospels are almost entirely silent about the boyhood of Christ. S. Matthew tells us nothing about His life at Nazareth, while S. Luke only mentions one episode, the visit to Jerusalem. In two verses, however, S. Luke comments upon the growth of the Child:—

"And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled

with wisdom : and the grace of God was upon Him " (ii. 40).

" And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men " (ii. 52).

These two verses are important as they clearly point out that our Lord's humanity was real. The Child Jesus was like any other child, except that in His case the development was at each stage perfect. There was real growth in physique, in intellectual apprehension, and in spiritual discernment. Gradually the divine Ideal for man was realized, step by step. The intellect directed towards the attainment of the highest knowledge; the spirit looking out steadfastly to God, untroubled by disordered passions; the will in complete harmony with the divine purpose. Such would seem to be the purport of S. Luke's words.

But, omitting for the moment the visit to Jerusalem, is it not possible to reconstruct in some measure the boyhood of the Saviour? There is something so singularly fascinating about child life, that frequently it is the early days of great men and women that compel our interest. Then we see a spontaneity and freshness which in the full grown man are less apparent. The Gospel records present us with a vivid portrait of the Man Jesus, in which the buoyancy and freedom of youth are blended with the sterner and severer traits of manhood. But what of the boy Jesus? Is there no information with the aid of which we can delineate with some degree of truthfulness His daily life at Nazareth?

Now there are two main sources of information which may assist us in our task. From what S. Luke has already told us we may safely infer that our Lord was brought up as a Jewish child, and would therefore receive the training and education provided for the children of the poorer classes. Fortunately we possess fairly full information relating to the upbringing of Jewish children. This is our first source for reconstructing the boyhood of Jesus.

The second source of information is derived from some of our Lord's sayings and parables, which seem to be reminiscent of His boyhood and home-life at Nazareth.

Assuming, then, that our Lord was trained as any other Jewish child, we can reconstruct for ourselves something of His life at home and school.

The little house at Nazareth would be well filled; for there were not only Joseph and Mary and Jesus, but four brothers and several sisters. According to the interpretation we have advanced Jesus would be the youngest of the family. He was an only Son indeed, but in His home-life He was not denied the companionship and that invaluable discipline which a large family provides. Home-life among the Jews was a sacred bond, the hallowed strength of which perhaps to-day we find a little difficult to appreciate. Family religion, no doubt somewhat artificial in some cases, made a deep impression upon the daily life. Yet surely we are right if we state with confidence that the home at Nazareth, with the saintly Joseph, and the Blessed Mary, and the Divine

Child, was permeated by a religion that sanctified all the formalities. There were the morning and the evening prayers, the washings and prayers and thanksgivings that hallowed every meal. The Sabbath was a holy day, a day of joy, when the Sabbath lamp burnt brightly in the home, and the table was furnished with the best. On that day Joseph would bless each member of the family in turn, and the day was closed with a solemn preparation for the week's work. These daily prayers and Sabbath observances must indeed have found a ready response in the soul of the Child Jesus. Already, perhaps, He saw their danger, in His neighbours' homes it may be, where the form crushed out the spirit. The great Feasts, too, were carefully observed—most of all the Passover. "What mean ye by this service?" was a question Jesus would ask of Joseph, who would explain the great deliverance. The home training in religious faith and practice was based very largely upon the Scriptures. Jesus would be taught at a very early age passages from the Law and the Psalms. His familiarity with the Scriptures, so manifest in the Gospels, may be traced in the first place to His home training. The "Mesusah" attached to the doorpost of every clean dwelling-house inhabited by Jews, with its passages of Scripture, would also impress deeply the obligations of religion upon a child's mind.¹

¹ See article, "Boyhood of Jesus," *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*.

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At the age of six Jesus would go to a primary school attached to the synagogue. The teacher was the chazzan or minister,¹ who was supported by the synagogue congregation, but did not receive any fees from the pupils.

Such in outline would be our Lord's training at home and school. It was an education grounded in the elements of the Jewish faith and based upon the Holy Scriptures. From S. Luke's words quoted above we can safely infer that the Child Jesus was not only a diligent scholar, but gave unmistakable evidence of more than ordinary spiritual insight. Already there was awakening within Him the consciousness of His unique Sonship and a sense of His equally unique vocation.

There is, however, another side to our Lord's boyhood which we can gather from His sayings and parables. These consistently reveal a love of nature—the flowers, the seed, the harvest, the birds of the air. His boyhood was not spent in the stuffy atmosphere of a synagogue, nor yet was His education confined to academic study. There is nothing "bookish" about Jesus. He loved and lived the open life—the life of fishermen and farmers. Such was the life of His boyhood.

"In the Gospels we find . . . the same faithfulness to living nature, another country-bred boy with the same love for bird and beast and the wild, open country-side."² Nazareth stood near the great highways of commerce, and along them passed the

¹ S. Luke iv. 20.

² Glover, *The Jesus of History*, p. 31.

caravans with their merchandise. The traders and the pilgrims "from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south," would be closely scrutinized by the observant Child, and gave a universalistic touch to His outlook.

Reminiscences of His home-life may be further detected in the Parable of the Lost Coin and in His intimate knowledge of a housewife's duties and domestic arrangements.

So "Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." His was a *real* life—the life of a *real* boy; but, as the one episode of His boyhood makes evident, there was already dawning upon Him the consciousness of His high calling.

(viii) THE VISIT TO THE TEMPLE

At the age of twelve a Jewish child became "a son of the law," and as such the observance of the Jewish fasts and feasts became binding upon him. Joseph and Mary had gone up to the Temple each year for the Feast of the Passover; but now that Jesus was of age He too accompanied them.¹ All the pilgrims from Nazareth would form themselves into a caravan, and it is just possible that the men

¹ This may not have been the first occasion on which our Lord accompanied His parents to the Feast. There is something to be said for the view that the legislation about the "son of the law" did not have force until after A.D. 70; and the age was not twelve but thirteen. Perhaps, then, if this was our Lord's first Passover, it was not because He had then reached the legal age, but Archelaus having been banished in A.D. 6 and a Roman governor appointed over Judaea it was now safe for our Lord to visit the Temple.

and women travelled in separate companies, the children being either with the men or women. As the pilgrims made their ascent to the Holy City they sang the "Songs of Degrees."¹ From S. Luke's account it is to be inferred that Joseph and Mary stayed seven days in Jerusalem and then began the return journey. They had completed one day's travel when they discovered the Child was not with them. The most intelligible explanation of why the Child was not missed earlier is that, assuming the men and women travelled in separate companies, then Mary might have thought Jesus was with Joseph, and Joseph that He was with Mary. After three days they found the Child. They retraced their steps a day's journey, and on the third day found Jesus "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." No doubt these words have been frequently misinterpreted by the popular mind. There is no suggestion that Jesus was "preaching," or that His knowledge in the academic sense surpassed that of the learned doctors. The fact that Jesus was *sitting* makes it plain that He was a learner; and He was listening. The questioning by the pupils was the method of instruction then in vogue. That He was intellectually alert and possessed an "intuitive" knowledge of sacred things is confirmed by the amazement of all who heard Him. The key, however, to the whole scene is to be found in the answer our Lord gave to His Mother's question, "Son, why hast Thou

¹ Pss. cxx-cxxxiv.

thus dealt with us? behold, Thy father and I sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?"

Our Lord answers His Mother by asking a question; a question that challenged the meaning of the words the Virgin had used. He places in antithesis the alleged fatherhood of Joseph and the Fatherhood of God, and the house at Nazareth and the Temple at Jerusalem. The words "My Father's house" are intended to convey much more than the prosaic fact that since Jesus was a son of Abraham therefore God was His Father. To interpret the Sonship of Christ as expressed in this saying as only equivalent to the sonship of any other Jew is to disregard the antitheses which are so obvious. The phrase implies that Joseph was *not* His father, nor yet the house at Nazareth His proper dwelling-place: but God is His Father, and the Temple—the Father's House—the place where the Son must be. Thus the expression, "My Father's house," clearly conveys a consciousness of the Divine Sonship. It may be true that the "first word He learnt to say was probably *Abba*"¹; but in this question Jesus claims the Father as His own, implying a unique relationship. It is conceivable that in the Temple the consciousness of His unique Sonship first attained to a clearness and definiteness that could find expression in human speech; but it is psychologically improbable that it was then for

¹ Glover, *The Jesus of History*, p. 41.

the first time that the consciousness was aroused. In the Temple that which hitherto had been undefined and inarticulate became intelligible to Himself, and therefore expressible.

The failure on the part of Joseph and Mary to "understand," so far from discrediting the narrative, confirms its genuineness. It fits in with the psychology of the situation. Even had Joseph and Mary fully realized from the very beginning the uniqueness of their Son, each stage in the manifestation of His divine humanity must have baffled the understanding. That which is unique always has, and always must.

CHAPTER V

The Virgin-Birth in the New Testament

(i) THE NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE

WE have examined the records of our Lord's Birth and Infancy as preserved in the Gospels of S. Matthew and S. Luke. We have observed their independent character, and the difficulty of harmonizing them in every detail. The arguments advanced against the genuineness of the whole or part of the narratives have also been considered. In no case are the arguments convincing. The Hebraistic setting of S. Matthew and S. Luke rules out the possibility of pagan influence, even if in contemporary mythology a virgin-birth entered, which is more than doubtful. From S. Matthew's account the Virgin-Birth cannot be eliminated except by tearing the narrative to shreds. That it was due to a mistranslation and misinterpretation of a prophecy in Isaiah does not, as we saw, fit in with what we know of Jewish expectations in regard to the Messiah. In S. Luke there is only one verse which makes explicit reference to the miraculous conception, but this cannot be omitted without doing violence to the ideas underlying the annunciation to Mary. We have, therefore, no cogent reason for supposing that the Gospel of the Infancy is any other than what it

claims to be—a simple, straightforward account of the Birth and Childhood of Christ. That the narratives have in their form been influenced by earlier Jewish models is admitted; but in their essential facts we have every reason to regard them as historical.

Having said this, however, we still have some difficult questions to answer. While our inquiry has not been confined to the Virgin-Birth, that fact nevertheless has necessarily been in the forefront all the time. We have yet to inquire into the relation of the Virgin-Birth to the rest of the New Testament evidence. If there are clear expressions in the New Testament, outside the Gospels we have considered, of our Lord's natural conception, then we should be bound to admit that within the New Testament itself there were two contradictory traditions of our Lord's mode of entrance into the world. On the other hand, if we find in the New Testament expressions which, while not definitely describing Jesus as the natural son of Joseph, are somewhat vague and uncertain in their connotation, we might infer that they are not incongruous with a miraculous conception. Above all—and this is a consideration of paramount importance—we have need to observe whether the Virgin-Birth as preserved in S. Matthew and S. Luke, the evidence for which in these Gospels there is no cogent reason for rejecting, harmonizes with the conception of Christ's Person portrayed in the New Testament.

It is frequently alleged that apart from the opening

chapters of S. Matthew and S. Luke there is no evidence for the Virgin-Birth, but on the contrary there are many statements in the New Testament which conflict with the belief.

Before we can profitably examine the remainder of the New Testament evidence bearing on our Lord's Birth, we have to inquire into the nature of the literature we are scrutinizing. Now there remain two Gospels, the Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Revelation. We will take these in turn, and try to discover the aims of the writers and observe any references which deny, conflict with, or corroborate the miraculous conception of Jesus. We begin with S. Mark's Gospel, which, although not the earliest writing of the New Testament, nevertheless contains, we believe, the most primitive account of our Lord's life extant. It has already been pointed out that S. Mark's Gospel rests largely upon the preaching of S. Peter. It is not a detailed account of the life of Christ. It preserves those actions and sayings of the Master which impressed themselves most vividly upon S. Peter's mind. It is a record of the primitive Apostolic teaching. Now when the origin of this Gospel is thus understood it is not difficult to see why there is no record of the Birth and Infancy of our Lord. To neither of these facts could S. Peter bear personal witness. It does not follow, however, that neither S. Peter nor S. Mark was aware of the Virgin-Birth, but the design of the Gospel excluded it. The Gospel opens with the ministry of the Forerunner and the Baptism of Christ.

From the Acts of the Apostles we see that it was from this point that the Apostolic preaching began.¹ The silence of S. Mark as to our Lord's Birth is thus easily understood when we grasp the origin and purpose of the Gospel.

But this being admitted, it is frequently argued that S. Mark contains passages which conflict so vehemently with the Virgin-Birth that it is incredible that S. Peter or S. Mark could have believed it. S. Mark, it is alleged, is not only silent, but actually testifies against the belief. The inference that is drawn from this is: either the Virgin-Birth was a late but true interpolation in the Gospels of S. Matthew and S. Luke; or it is an interpolation not resting on fact, but due to "religious instinct" or one or other of the influences considered in the first chapter.

Now let us look at the passages of S. Mark cited as evidence against the Virgin-Birth. S. Mark iii. 21 reads, "And when his friends heard it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself." Our Lord had cured a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath Day, and had healed many people, so that the "unclean spirits" declared Him to be the Son of God. Having appointed the twelve Apostles He returned home, most probably to S. Peter's house, where the multitudes surged upon Him, and then there followed the incident recorded above. It is suggested that His friends were His own relatives, and that it was strange that those "who, one would naturally suppose, knew of His miraculous

¹ Acts i. 21, 22.

Birth, regarded the opening of His ministerial work not as the natural sequel of that unique beginning, but as a sign of madness.”¹ Now this line of argument rests upon a number of assumptions difficult to substantiate. In the first place “His friends” might stand equally well for His earliest disciples, who certainly at this stage had no inkling of His supernatural conception. In the second place, even if by “friends” is to be understood “relatives,” it is highly probable they would not be acquainted with the miraculous Birth; and even if they were they certainly would not have grasped the meaning of His Messiahship so completely as to associate with it the miracles He was working. Only by degrees did His most intimate companions—His disciples—come to understand the Person and work of their Master. At this stage of our Lord’s ministry such an expression is not difficult to explain on psychological grounds, without considering it as evidence against the Virgin-Birth.

Later, in the same chapter, “his mother and brethren” came to our Lord, “and, standing without, they sent unto him, calling him.”² From this incident it is argued that if Mary had miraculously conceived Christ she would have naturally associated with His career the miracles He had worked. The attitude of Mary is therefore unintelligible. But such criticism is, once again, entirely lacking in psychological insight. What, after all, is more perfectly

¹ Thompson, *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 137.

² S. Mark iii. 31.

natural than that Mary, who at the Birth of her Son had been warned that she should suffer, and now in the hostility of the Scribes perceived the opening of the agony, should show this anxiety on behalf of her Son? Mary, after all, was a woman and a mother. Her womanly instincts never deserted her. She was indeed bewildered at the career of her Son; but had she known all that was going to happen from the very beginning, each stage in its actual accomplishment would have brought with it astonishment.

Mr. Thompson remarks that the event recorded in S. Mark vi. 1 ff. "could not possibly have been told as it has been, if the narrator had known anything about the Virgin-Birth."¹ This narrative describes our Lord's return to Nazareth, where He taught in the synagogue. His teaching and mighty works called forth the expression of surprise, "Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon and are not His sisters here with us?" Our Lord frankly expressed disappointment at the unbelief of His own kin, and He does not deny the natural relationship of His brethren to Himself. But the narrative is so true to experience that it seems these very traits which are held to discredit the Virgin-Birth stamp the record as authentic. Whether such a record could not have been written by one knowing "anything about the Virgin-Birth," it is impossible to prove. What this narrative does contain, however,

¹ *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 138.

is a unique description of our Lord, which might be urged as highly consistent with a miraculous conception. Jesus is described as "the carpenter, the Son of Mary." In S. Matthew and S. Luke, where the same incident is reported, our Lord is designated "the carpenter's son" and "Joseph's son." Both these expressions need to be interpreted in the light of the Virgin-Birth previously described in the Gospels. There is no such miraculous conception recorded in S. Mark. It is significant, however, that on the first occasion in S. Mark's Gospel that our Lord's parentage is mentioned it is in this striking phrase, "the Son of Mary." This is the only place in the New Testament where the phrase is used. It is doubtful whether in the mouths of the common people it could be interpreted as implying supernatural begetting. It is, however, extremely probable that it implies more than the fact that Joseph was dead, since in Jewish literature a son is very rarely described as "of his mother." Without therefore pressing the significance of this epithet to include the miraculous conception, it does seem to express some abnormal relationship existing between Jesus and Mary. This can scarcely be regarded as evidence against the Virgin-Birth.

Our Lord's interpretation of Psalm cx, as recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels,¹ is held by some to imply a physical descent from David, to the exclusion of the Virgin-Birth. The question our Lord raises is, How can the Davidic sonship of the Messiah be

¹ S. Mark xii. 35-37; S. Matt. xxii. 41-45; S. Luke xx. 41-44.

reconciled with His spiritual superiority to David? If our Lord's comment on this psalm has any bearing on the Virgin-Birth at all, then it may be said to argue in favour of it. If David called the Messiah "Lord," then clearly the Christ, although his son, could not be so in any merely physical sense.

Now while in S. Mark there is no clear expression that can be interpreted as implying a miraculous conception, none of the above passages conflict with it. On the contrary, they appear to confirm it.

We pass next to S. John, which is much later than any literature we have so far examined. We take S. John next because we might reasonably expect to find evidence for or against the Virgin-Birth in a Gospel rather than in the Epistles. It is true that S. John gives no account of our Lord's Birth or Infancy, but he presents the Incarnation of the Son from another point of view. S. John was familiar with the Synoptic Gospels, and if the Virgin-Birth was actually a fact he must have known it. It seems almost impossible from a reading of the Prologue to S. John's Gospel to conclude that the Word became flesh by human generation. There is no phrase, it is true, which need necessarily be interpreted as connoting a miraculous conception, but the whole tenour of the Prologue fits in with this view. Further, S. John i. 13 has an alternative reading witnessed to by a number of Fathers from the second century onwards: "*Who was born, not of bloods [i.e. not of the mixture of human seeds] nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*" If this

reading is correct, it clearly indicates the Virgin-Birth; but apart from this, the fundamental idea underlying the Prologue is not that of a natural begetting.

In S. John vi. 41 a murmuring is reported on the part of the people because Jesus called Himself the Bread that came down from heaven. "And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how doth he now say, I am come down out of heaven?" It is true S. John records these questions "without comment"; but the context makes it plain that the misunderstanding on the part of the people arose out of their failure to grasp the unique Sonship of Christ. The emphasis throughout this passage is upon God's Fatherhood of Jesus. It was the Father Who had sent the Son into the world. Jesus does not in so many words deny the fatherhood of Joseph, but the emphasis upon the Divine Fatherhood does, in fact, repudiate this misunderstanding.

There are three passages in S. John's Gospel which suggest that Christ was born in Galilee, and on this ground His Messiahship was challenged. In the first, S. John i. 46, Nathanael says to Philip, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It is not here stated that Christ was born in Nazareth. The second, S. John vii. 40-42 implies that the Jews believed that Christ came from Nazareth, whereas they knew full well that the Messiah should come from Bethlehem. It would be futile to argue that S. John himself believed Christ was born in

Nazareth. He is reporting what the Jews said, and leaves it without comment, and thus the full irony is appreciated. The same remark applies to S. John vii. 52, "Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

S. John, it is true, does not describe the Virgin-Birth. In its place he speaks of the Logos that became flesh. His theology is far in advance of S. Mark's, and he has a developed and definite view of the Incarnation. Christ is the Eternal Word. Bound up with this fundamental concept we suggest there is implied the Virgin-Birth of Christ. S. John assumes in his readers a knowledge of the Synoptic Gospels, and therefore he leaves the references to Galilee and Nazareth unexplained. The fundamental ideas underlying the Gospel are highly congruous with a miraculous conception.

We now pass to the Epistles of S. Paul, and we have to remember that they do not attempt to work out fully a theology. They were occasional writings, called forth by special circumstances. It would be precarious, therefore, to argue from their silence in regard to any doctrine or practice. We should, however, imagine that S. Paul, the fellow-traveller and friend of S. Luke, must have been acquainted with the Virgin-Birth. On the other hand, there are very few references to our Lord's earthly life in his Epistles, and S. Paul's silence must not therefore be urged against the belief. There are two passages frequently quoted with the object of proving that S. Paul knew nothing of the Virgin-Birth. The

first is Galatians iv. 4, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." The phrase "born of a woman," it is said, could not have been written by one who believed in the Virgin-Birth. But to argue from this phrase for or against the belief is precarious. S. Paul might have removed all doubt by putting "born of a virgin"; and although the phrase "born of a woman" suggests natural generation, it cannot be said to exclude absolutely the thought of supernatural conception.

The second passage is Romans i. 3, 4, "Who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, . . . declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead." The contrast here seems to lie between the body and the spirit, both of which in Christ are human, "distinguished, however, from that of ordinary humanity by an exceptional and transcendent holiness."¹ "Flesh" and "spirit" are not therefore opposed as human and divine, and it is not S. Paul's teaching that Christ *became* the Son of God by the resurrection. The phrase "born of the seed of David according to the flesh," while asserting the reality of Christ's humanity and His Davidic descent, does not necessarily rule out the supernatural conception.

"We can only say that S. Paul does not touch the question of the Virgin-Birth of Jesus, and that his statements do not prejudice it either way."²

¹ Sanday and Headlam on *Romans*.

² G. B. Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 391-2.

There are two similar expressions in the Acts of the Apostles : ii. 30 (S. Peter's speech)—“ of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne ” ; and xiii. 23 (S. Paul at Antioch)—“ Of this man's [David's] seed hath God . . . brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.” These passages insist upon the Davidic descent of our Lord, but it would be unwise to build upon them an argument against the Virgin-Birth.¹

If we attempt to sum up the New Testament evidence for the Virgin-Birth of Jesus, we shall have to admit that it is positively confined to S. Matthew and S. Luke. The other two Gospels, while not contradicting it, have no direct references to it, while the Epistles of S. Paul and the Acts of the Apostles are silent. There is, then, no clear corroborative evidence in the New Testament of the Virgin-Birth, related in the opening chapters of S. Matthew and S. Luke. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that no passage from the New Testament can be advanced which clearly and definitely repudiates the doctrine.

What seems quite clear is that the Virgin-Birth did not enter into the earliest teaching of the Church. The Apostles had first to bear their personal witness. Christ had been declared the Son of God by the Resurrection. This is unquestionably the earliest tradition. Later, however, the Incarnation became

¹ The Revelation is silent on the Virgin-Birth, unless it can be said to have influenced the mythological figure in chapter xii—, “the woman arrayed with the sun,” who “was delivered of a son.”

more central, and an attempt was made to grasp the significance of the Person of Christ. What relation, then, has the Virgin-Birth to the Person of Christ in the New Testament?

(ii) THE VIRGIN-BIRTH AND THE SINLESSNESS
OF JESUS

We will confine our attention to one point upon which the Virgin-Birth might be thought to have some direct bearing—the sinlessness of Jesus. There are numerous references in the Pauline Epistles and elsewhere to the perfection of Christ's life.

2 Corinthians v. 21: "Who knew no sin."

Romans iii. 21–26: "But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by His blood, to show His righteousness . . . that He might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus."

In this tremendous passage Jesus is clearly distinguished from all who have fallen short of the glory of God.

Romans viii. 3: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending

His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."

Christ's humanity is thus unique—"in the *likeness* of sinful flesh."

S. Peter also bears his witness to the absolute sinlessness of Christ.

1 S. Peter ii. 22: "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."

1 S. Peter i. 19: "Without blemish and without spot."

1 S. Peter iii. 18: "Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous."

Also in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read (iv. 15): "For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Throughout these Epistles Christ's humanity is regarded as sinless, without spot, and perfect; but nowhere in the New Testament is this sinlessness, or indeed His pre-existence, related definitely to the mode of His entrance into the world.

The portrait of Christ presented in the Epistles is that of One utterly without sin. Such indeed is the portrait consistently presented in the New Testament. There is never a suggestion that Christ in any respect fell short of the mark. He is unique in His perfect manhood. This is so both in the Gospels and Epistles.

What do we mean by sinlessness? Negatively, we may say it means that Christ overcame all

temptation. That is the verdict of the New Testament writers. That too was the tacit admission of His enemies. All temptation was resisted; both that arising from outward attraction as well as from inward impulse. This fact does indeed set Jesus in a category apart. Of no other man has it ever been said, "He did no sin." His temptations were real—most real; yet there was in them a certain limitation. He was free from those temptations arising from previous sin. Now we are bound to ask, Is such sinlessness as this congruous with human nature as we know it? The greatest saints have acknowledged themselves the greatest sinners. But not so Christ. He was conscious of His sinlessness, and actually forgave others their sins. Is it conceivable that such sinlessness is compatible with a human birth? With us there is the "traitor within the camp"; certain predispositions that incline us to sin. They are part and parcel of our nature. In Christ this entail was cut off.

Positively, the sinlessness of Jesus implies that He fulfilled His mission without ever wavering. He realized completely the purpose of His life. He made evident in their perfection the potentialities we all possess.

Sinlessness in its twofold aspect is thus seen in Christ. This clearly sets Him apart from all men who ever lived. But does it dehumanize Jesus? Was His humanity real? The same reading of the Gospels and Epistles which reveals His sinlessness also makes plain the reality of His humanity. But

in Jesus humanity was complete, perfected, sinless. It was our humanity "apart from sin." Humanity as we have ever known it, apart from Jesus, has been in some degree tainted by sin; but it has ever been thereby an imperfect expression of humanity. In Jesus humanity is seen in its true light—as God intends it to become. Because Jesus was sinless He is indeed removed from us; but He exhibited humanity perfectly and truly. Sin, therefore, is not essential to humanity, but a corruption of it. The sinlessness of Jesus, so far from dehumanizing Him, shows Him to be perfectly human. We have learned to interpret all things in relation to their *end*.

We are bound to ask whether sinlessness is intelligible in a person living in a real world, and conceived after a natural fashion. At once we feel that it is not so. Temptations may indeed be overcome, but others and more subtle take their place, while the nearer the Divine Ideal is approached the further it appears to recede. Jesus was able to say "It is finished." The sinlessness of Jesus baffles all explanation unless we concede that in Him humanity had a fresh start. His was a new nature. The entail of sin was thus cut off. How this was effected is described in the Gospel narrative. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost.

Now the fact that neither S. Paul nor any other New Testament writer relates the miraculous conception to the sinlessness of Jesus is perhaps best understood by observing that no explanation is

offered at all of this sinlessness. The fact is stated, but it is not theorized about. The Virgin-Birth is highly congruous with that fact. Indeed it would be extremely difficult to attempt to explain it apart from some such supernatural generation.

We do not, of course, suggest that the perfect humanity of Christ could not have been revealed in any other way, or that a virgin-birth was a necessary condition of the entrance into the world of the Perfect Man. All that we are concerned with is the fact that Christ is declared to be sinless, and the Virgin-Birth does fit in with this fact.

If we accept the Virgin-Birth as a fact in time (and the evidence for it, as we have seen, although not overwhelming, is hard to repudiate) then it was a great miracle; and we may be sure that a miracle of this character would not be worked to no purpose. The miracle of the Resurrection clearly demonstrated the Divine Sonship of Jesus. The Virgin-Birth, in itself unique, is a fit mode of entrance for the unique Man into the world.

We cannot say that the Incarnation of God could not have been effected in any other way. The real point is that the Gospels describe a mode of God's entrance into Manhood which at least partly satisfies the human reason. Jesus might have been as truly perfect Man and perfect God had His conception been due to human agency. This would, however, seem to involve a far greater miracle than the Virgin-Birth, and the intellect would be still more baffled than it is by a miraculous conception. On

all showing Christ was Man, but more than Man. He was God. He is unique. The Virgin-Birth, therefore, like the Resurrection, harmonizes with His Person.¹

While this is true we are not bound to argue that the sinlessness of Jesus is dependent upon His unique conception. No argument in the New Testament is based on this view. The sinlessness of Jesus would still remain even if the Virgin-Birth were removed. Nevertheless, although we do not presume to argue that the Virgin-Birth is essential to the sinlessness of Jesus, it does harmonize with it.

The emphasis, as already indicated, has changed from the earliest days. At first it was on the Resurrection. It is now on the Incarnation. That is the central truth of Christianity. The Catholic Church has always accepted the Virgin-Birth as the mode of the Incarnation. "Who was born of the Holy Ghost from the Virgin Mary" appeared in the earliest form of the Roman Creed, date about A.D. 100. From the beginning of the second century we have evidence that it formed a part of the regular Church tradition. Thus Ignatius writes:—

"For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in

¹ "But we dare not call virgin-birth a *sine qua non* of Sonship. . . . At the same time strong grounds can be adduced for accepting the belief as in complete harmony with the Christian thought of Jesus, as dovetailing into the rest of our conviction naturally and simply."—R. H. Mackintosh, *The Person of Christ*, p. 531. In the same connection Dr. Mackintosh writes: "The story has an exquisite natural fitness, and its vogue is nearly impossible to explain save by the hypothesis of its truth."—*Ibid.*, p. 527.

the womb by Mary according to a dispensation of the seed of David, but also of the Holy Ghost ; and He was born and was baptized, that by His Passion He might cleanse water. And hidden from the prince of this world were the virginity of Mary and her child-bearing, and likewise also the death of the Lord—three mysteries to be cried aloud—which were wrought in the silence of God.”¹

And Justin Martyr :—

“ The words, then, ‘ Behold a virgin shall conceive ’ signify that the Virgin should conceive without intercourse ; for if she had had intercourse with any one whatsoever, she would have been no longer a virgin. But the power of God coming upon the Virgin overshadowed her, and caused her, being a virgin, to conceive. And the Angel of God, who was sent to the Virgin herself at that time, brought her glad tidings, saying, ‘ Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb of the Holy Ghost, and shalt bring forth a Son, and He shall be called the Son of the Most High, and thou shalt call His Name Jesus, for He shall deliver His people from their sins,’ as they who have related all the things about our Saviour Jesus Christ taught.”²

Celsus, an opponent of the Christian Church, maintained that a soldier named Panthera (obviously a corruption of parthenos, virgin) was the father of our Lord. To this Origen replies :—
“ It was naturally to be expected that those who could not believe in the marvellous Birth of Jesus

¹ Ignatius, *Ad. Eph.*, 18, 19.

² Justin, *Apol.*, i. 33.

would invent some false story; but they did not do it in a plausible manner, for by preserving the tradition that the Virgin did not conceive from Joseph, they made clear the falsity of their position to those accustomed to criticism."¹

Such is the constant tradition of the Church. The mode, however, of the Incarnation is necessarily of secondary importance to the fact itself. The crucial point is whether the line of argument that discredits, or tends to discredit, the mode might not lead on to a denial of the fact of the Incarnation. It is significant that some critics eliminate the Virgin-Birth because they have a prejudice against the supernatural. These same critics present us with a portrait of Christ as a great Man indeed; but certainly not the God-Man of the New Testament. It is extremely doubtful whether the Incarnation would have been so tenaciously held by the Catholic Church had the Virgin-Birth been repudiated; and further, we believe that a denial of the Virgin-Birth is the first step towards a denial of the Incarnation. In the place of the God-Man we are given a human Jesus, pre-eminent indeed, but not God.

With these reflections we close this book. The evidence for the Virgin-Birth we believe is adequate; but it cannot be separated from the greater question of the Person of Christ. The Virgin-Birth does justice to what we believe about Jesus of Nazareth. The mode of Incarnation is of secondary import-

¹ *Origen contra Celsum*, i. 32.

ance to the fact; but mode and fact stand in vital relation to each other; and the trend of criticism seems to show that a denial of the one prepares the way for the repudiation of the central dogma of Christianity.

APPENDIX

The Childhood of Christ in the Apocryphal Gospels

THE Apocryphal Gospels are writings about our Lord's life which were not included in the New Testament Canon. They arose from two chief causes: (a) curiosity for a more detailed knowledge of our Lord's life, especially where the record in the Canonical Gospels is scanty; and (b) doctrinal considerations which led to a presentment in an exaggerated and fanciful manner of a particular view—orthodox or unorthodox—of the Person of our Lord. The Canonical Gospels and oral tradition have been drawn upon by the writers, but there are also clear indications of Gnostic and Buddhist influences. By the end of the second century the Canon of the New Testament was fixed, but the Apocryphal Gospels were still read, and although they were repudiated by the Church in the fourth century their popularity has revived from time to time. Possessing little evidential value, they are obviously romances, and vastly inferior to the Canonical Gospels. In excluding them from the New Testament Canon we believe the Church was acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

“A comparison of the Apocryphal Gospels with those in the Canon makes the pre-eminence of the latter incontestably clear, and shows that as sources of Christ's life the former, for all practical purposes,

may be neglected. The simple beauty and verisimilitude of the picture of Jesus in the four Gospels stand out in strong relief when viewed in the light of the artificial and legendary stories which characterize most of the Apocryphal Gospels. The proverbial simplicity of truth receives a striking commentary when (for example) the miracles of the Canonical Gospels are compared with those of the Apocryphal writings. The former, for the most part, are instinct with ethical purpose and significance, and are felt to be the natural and unforced expression of the sublime personality of Jesus; the latter are largely theatrical exhibitions without ethical content. . . . The conclusion, based on the comparison of the Apocryphal with the Canonical Gospels, is amply warranted, that in rejecting the former and choosing the latter as authoritative Scriptures the Church showed a true feeling for what was original and authentic.”¹

The following are the Apocryphal Gospels that give an account of our Lord's Birth and Infancy :—

1. *The Protevangelium of James*. This professes to be the work of James, believed by early Christians to be the Lord's brother, but probably it was not written until late in the second century. The author was not altogether familiar with Jewish customs, as he describes Mary as a “temple-virgin.” The aim of the work is dogmatic—to defend the Person of Christ and the virginity of Mary.

The book opens with an account of Joachim and Anna, the parents of Mary, and the wonderful circum-

¹ A. F. Findlay, *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*.

stances attending her birth. When three years old Mary was presented to the Lord and brought up in the Temple. At the age of twelve she was entrusted to Joseph, who had been selected by a wonderful sign—a dove went out of his rod and flew upon his head. At first Joseph declined to receive “the virgin of the Lord” on account of his age, but fearing to disobey the divine sign he “took her to keep with himself.” Mary is next chosen to spin “the true purple and the scarlet” for the Temple curtain. Then follows the Annunciation: “And she took the waterpot and went out to draw water; and behold a voice, saying, Hail, thou favoured one, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women. And she looked about right and left, to see whence this voice came. And becoming afraid, she went away to her home, and set down the waterpot; and taking the purple she sat on her seat and spun it. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood before her, saying, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour before the Lord of all, and thou shalt conceive from His word. And when she heard she disputed in herself, saying, Shall I conceive from the Lord, the living God, and bear as every woman beareth? And the angel of the Lord said, Not so, Mary; for the power of the Lord will overshadow thee; wherefore also that holy thing which is born of thee shall be called the Son of the Most High; and thou shalt call His Name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins. And Mary said, Behold, the servant of the Lord is before Him; be it unto me according to thy word.”¹

¹ Chap. xi, Cowper's translation.

Mary then visited Elisabeth, and we are told "she was sixteen years old when these strange things happened."¹ Joseph was much alarmed when he found she was with child, but the secret was revealed to him in a dream. Mary, with Joseph, is accused before the priest, who caused them "to drink the water of the Lord's reproof," that their sin might be manifest. But no sin was found in them. Then followed the journey for the enrolment:—

"And they came in the midst of the road, and Mary said to him, Take me down from the ass, for my burden urgeth me to be delivered. And he took her down from the ass, and said to her, Whither shall I take thee, and hide thy shame? for the place is desolate.

"And he found a cave there, and took her in, and set his sons by her, and he went out and sought a midwife in the country of Bethlehem."²

Then Joseph had a wonderful vision, in which he saw "the air violently agitated, the pole of heaven stationary, the fowls of heaven still . . . and everything which was being impelled forward was intercepted in its course."

The birth is thus described:—

"And the midwife went with Joseph. And they stood in the place where the cave was, and behold a bright cloud overshadowed the cave. And the midwife said, My soul is magnified to-day, because my eyes have seen strange things; for salvation is

¹ But the copies vary, reading 14, 15, 17, and 18, as well as 16.

² Chaps. xvii-xviii.

born to Israel. And suddenly the cloud withdrew from the cave, and there appeared a great light in the cave, so that their eyes could not bear it. And gradually that light withdrew until the Babe was seen, and it came and took the breast from its mother Mary. And the midwife cried out and said, To-day is a great day to me, for I have seen this novel sight. And the midwife went out of the cave, and Salome met her; and she said to her, Salome, Salome, I have a novel sight to tell thee! A virgin hath brought forth, which is not in accordance with the course of nature."¹

Then follow the visit of the Magi and the slaughter of the Innocents. Mary hid her Child in a crib; Elisabeth and John were concealed by a mountain. Zacharias was slain in the Temple for not delivering up John, but his body miraculously disappeared, and his blood was turned into stone.

2. *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* follows fairly closely the *Protevangelium*, but adds many miracles of our Lord's Childhood. Thus on the way to Egypt:—

“And when they had come to a certain cave and wished to rest in it, the Blessed Mary came down from the beast, and sat and held the Child Jesus in her lap. Now there were with Joseph three youths, and with Mary a certain damsel, who went on their way at the same time; and behold there suddenly came out of the cave many dragons, seeing which the youths cried out through excessive fear. Then Jesus, descending from His mother's lap, stood on His feet before the dragons, and they adored Jesus,

¹ Chap. xix.

and then departed from them. . . . In like manner lions and leopards adored Him, and kept company with them in the desert.”¹

Jesus also shortened the journey so that thirty days’ travel was accomplished in one.

When Mary and the Child entered an Egyptian temple:—

“All the idols were prostrate on the earth, so that they all lay upon their faces wholly shattered and broken, and so they showed evidently that they were nothing.”²

There are numerous miracles recorded of our Lord’s life in Galilee—raising the dead, carrying water in His cloak, making sparrows of mud on the Sabbath Day, causing seed to grow miraculously, etc.

The following remarkable speech is also attributed to Jesus, in reply to Zaccheus, who advised Joseph to have the Child instructed in the Law:—

“Thou who readest the law, and art instructed so, remainest in the law; but I was before the law. But while thou thinkest thou hast no equal in learning, thou shalt be instructed by Me, for no other can teach aught but the things which thou hast named. . . . Thou knowest not when thou wast born; but I alone know when ye were born, and how long your life is in the earth. . . . The Pharisees answered, We never heard such words spoken by another child at such a childish age. And Jesus answering, said to them, Wonder ye at this that such things are spoken by a child? Why then do ye not believe Me in the

¹ Chaps. xviii-xix.

² Chap. xxiii.

things which I have spoken to you? And because I said to you that I know when ye were born, ye all marvel. I will say more to you, that ye may marvel more. I have seen Abraham, whom ye call your father, and talked with him, and he hath seen Me. . . .”¹

When the Child did go to school His master Levi was amazed at His knowledge.

The portrait of Christ presented in this book is a caricature of that found in the Gospels. There is an element of conceit and vindictiveness unknown to the Christ of the Gospels.

3. *The Childhood Gospel of Thomas* repeats the miracles, etc., of *Pseudo-Matthew*, but the character of the Child Jesus therein delineated is still further removed from the Gospel record.

4. *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy*.² This is a late composition, containing many fantastical legends. A few quotations will suffice to illustrate the nature of its contents:—

“Therefore, after sunset, the old woman and Joseph with her came to the cave, and both entered it. And lo, it was filled with lights more beautiful than the glittering of lamps and candles and brighter than the light of the sun. An infant wrapped in swaddling bands was suckling at the breast of lady Mary its mother, and laid in a manger. While they both wondered at this light, the old woman asked

¹ Chap. xxx; cf. S. John viii. 56–58.

² Influences of this book are to be found in the Koran. Muhammed appears to have derived his knowledge of Christ from legends and Apocryphal Gospels. There is no evidence in the Koran that he had ever seen a Canonical Gospel.

lady Mary, Art thou the mother of this Child? And when lady Mary had assented, she said, Thou art not like the daughters of Eve. Lady Mary said, As none among children is equal to my Son, so His mother hath no equal among women. The old woman replied, My lady, I am come to gain a reward; I have been a long while afflicted with paralysis. Our lady, lady Mary, said to her, Place thy hands on the Infant, which the old woman did, and was straightway restored.”¹

When the Magi visited our Lord the lady Mary gave them some of the swaddling bands, which on their return they showed to “the kings and their princes.” Then:—

“They celebrated a festival, and kindled fire according to their custom and worshipped it, and cast the swaddling band into it, and the fire seized it and absorbed it into itself. But when the fire went out, they drew forth the swaddling band just as it was at first, as if the fire had not touched it. Therefore they began to kiss it, and to place it on their heads and eyes, saying, Verily this is undoubted truth; it is indeed a great thing that the fire could not burn or destroy it. They took it thence, and with the greatest honour deposited it among their treasures.”²

Miraculous power is also attributed to the water in which Jesus had been washed, so that children were cleansed from leprosy by bathing in it.

A young man who by witchcraft had been changed into a mule is thus restored to human form—

¹ Chap. iii.

² Chap. viii.

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"... but this mule which thou seest was our brother, whom the women by a charm have made what thou seest. We pray thee, therefore, have pity on us. Then lamenting their lot, lady Mary lifted up the Lord Jesus and put Him on the back of the mule, and herself wept along with the women; and to Jesus Christ she said, Alas, my Son, heal this mule by Thy great power, and make him a man, endued with reason as he was formerly. When these words proceeded from the mouth of my lady, lady Mary, the mule changed its form, and became a man, a young man, who was whole without any blemish."¹

5. *The Gospel of the Nativity of Mary* mentions the Birth of our Lord without any elaborate detail. Its aim is to glorify the virginity of Mary, and follows very closely the *Protevangelium*, except that Mary does not go to Joseph's home after betrothal, but returns to her own. The Gospel opens as follows:—

"The blessed and glorious Mary, ever virgin, sprung of the royal stock and family of David, and born in the city of Nazareth, was brought up at Jerusalem in the Temple of the Lord."

6. *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*. The narrative is placed in the mouth of Jesus, Who relates the history of Joseph to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. Our Lord's Birth and Infancy are described without much embellishment, and in the main incidents there is a close correspondence with the *Protevangelium*.

¹ Chap. xxi.

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